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IMAGES OF GOD



# IMAGES OF GOD

*An Essay on the  
Life and Death of Symbols*

by

A. C. BRIDGE

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*List of Abbreviations*

N.T.	New Testament
O.T.	Old Testament
A.V.	Authorized Version of the Holy Bible
R.V.	Revised Version of the Holy Bible
mg	Marginal note

## PREFACE

As readers will soon discover, this essay is not so much a work of research or scholarship as one of synthesis. In some respects, it has turned out to be rather more controversial than I could have wished; for my intention has been to bridge gulfs, not to widen them. If, to however small an extent, this book helps to draw together those who, to-day, too often are divided — artists and Christians, poets and theologians, Catholics and Protestants, conservatives and radicals, sacramentalists and transcendentalists — it will have been worth writing. For, in a dark and divided world, which lives more and more in the water-tight compartments of specialization, and in a Church wounded by divisions, what is needful, above all, is the cirenic glimmer — however faint — of a new understanding and a new language to repair the damage done to traditional forms and language by old bigotry and old shibboleths. However dangerous new forms in theology may be, they must be sought, and if the risk of being considered grossly arrogant is one of those involved in so presumptuous a search, it must be incurred. For many of the forms, in which the common belief of Christendom has been traditionally expressed, now divide those whose unity they were created expressly to preserve; and this is intolerable.

My debt to the ideas and scholarship of others is so obvious and so great that it would be invidious to single out for acknowledgement any one person from the many whose brains I have picked, and whose labours I have plundered. But, while the shortcomings of this essay are entirely my own, perhaps I may be allowed here to thank those who have tacitly encouraged me to develop its main thesis. Its germ appeared first in *The Student Movement*. This was developed

more fully in *Theology*, and later the fully developed theme formed the basis of a series of lectures to the theological faculty of King's College, London. To the Editors of these journals and to the Dean of King's, I wish to express my thanks; while, to the Vicar and people of Hythe, by whose sufferance I wrote most of this book when I was working as a curate there, I send my love and apologies.

A. C. BRIDGE

## INTRODUCTION

IT has been said that theology is suffering from a rush of symbols to the head. Certainly, there are so many books on symbolism that the appearance of another is not easy to justify. Of course, the use of symbols in human affairs is so diverse and various that the study of them cannot be confined to a few standard works; but, even so, their function has already been explored so widely that the literature of the subject touches almost every department of human thought and activity. Any addition to it, therefore, can be justified only if both its limits and its purpose be clearly stated at the outset.

The limits of this book can be defined easily enough. It will be restricted to an inquiry into the conditions which govern the life, vigour, sickness, and death of two specific kinds of symbol only: those used by theologians and those used by artists. No attempt will be made to produce yet another comprehensive treatise on symbolism in general or to cover once again the well-trodden ground of philosophical analysis and classification. Within these narrow limits, the purpose of the book will be to show, first, that the apparently distinct kinds of symbol used respectively by artists and theologians are much more closely related than is commonly supposed; secondly, that an understanding of the symbols used in the arts is useful to the student of theological symbolism; and, thirdly, that an understanding of the arts is relevant to the problem of demythologization.

For this is the crucial problem of our day. It is crucial, not only because contemporary paganism finds the gospel unacceptable — paganism from St Paul's day to our own has always found it so — but because Christians, themselves,

whether they have heard of demythologization or not, already distinguish between some of the forms in which their belief has traditionally been expressed and the truth contained in those forms. The narrative of creation and the fall is a case in point. All Christians believe that God has created the world and that something has gone wrong with his creation; but very few of them believe in the literal and historical reality of the Adam and Eve story. However, many Christians do believe in the actuality of an angelic order of creation; and many more would passionately defend the historicity of every detail of the Matthean and Lucan birth narratives, not because they have good historical grounds for doing so, but simply because they like to believe these stories. Thus, the question to-day is not whether the Bible should be demythologized or not, for it is already being subjected to a partial version of this process by nearly all Christians in any case; the question is whether demythologization should be applied piecemeal as a matter of personal whim, choice, sentiment, and nostalgic predilection, or consistently. This is the crux of the matter, for, as long as individuals continue to pick and choose between those incidents in the Bible which they wish to consider as historical and those which they prefer to interpret as mythical there can be no agreement upon the nature of biblical truth, and the Church will lay itself open to the charge that its integrity is suspect because its criterion of truth lacks consistency. It would be optimistic to expect contemporary paganism to pay much attention to a gospel preached as the truth by people who cannot agree among themselves as to what sort of truth they are talking about.

So the debate on the demythologization of the Bible is, first and foremost, an attempt within the Church itself to understand better the nature and meaning of the truth it preaches. Only secondarily is it an attempt to discover a way of bridging the gulf which separates the Christian and the pagan. But, even if this be a secondary consideration, it is an integral part of the motive of the debate

and a vitally important matter. For the Church cannot be the Church if it does not continue to be a missionary body, and it is obvious that in our own day its missionary enterprise is made more difficult because the Christian and the pagan inhabit different worlds in which those truths which seem almost self-evident to the former look absurd to the latter, and in which the language used by the one sounds meaningless to the other. Indeed, this is so obvious that it is sometimes suggested that the gulf between the two worlds is a purely linguistic one. There is, of course, an element of truth in this. But if the problem of communication were merely a matter of language, it would be comparatively easy to put things right; for terminology can be taught and learned. At a deeper level, however, the difficulty of communication is acute because the two groups of people, not only use different language, but think in different ways. Professor Bultmann has summed the matter up by saying that the biblical statement that "in the fulness of time" God sent forth his Son, a pre-existent divine Being, who appears on earth as a man . . . is the language of mythology"; and that, as such, "it is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete".<sup>1</sup>

However, Bultmann goes on to point out that the statement that mythology is incredible is not the same as saying that myths cannot have meaning. On the contrary, it is the task of theology to discover what meaning, if any, mythical forms contain. Thus mythical statement has this at least in common with artistic statement that, while its terms may be literally incredible, it may still have meaning. Similarly, though no one takes poetic image for literal fact, this does not invalidate the whole realm of poetry, even if, with religion, it renders it unintelligible to a very large number of our contemporaries. In fact, readers of poetry are probably in as small a minority of the whole population of our industrialized, materialist society as are Christians. Where, in the Middle Ages and before, all forms

<sup>1</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, pp. 2 f. (S.P.C.K., 1953).

of art were readily intelligible to the mass of the people, to-day they are an esoteric preserve. In the early years of the fourteenth century, for instance, the people of Siena greeted the first appearance of Duccio's *Maesta* with an excitement which bordered on the riotous; whereas, to-day, the same painting is regarded as being strange, 'out of drawing', and unintelligible by all but a minority of experts and 'art lovers'. Meanwhile, the appearance of a new work by Picasso or Henry Moore, if it provokes anything at all, provokes only a riot of misunderstanding and ill-informed abuse.

Seeing, then, that art and theology can be shown to have at least something in common; and, moreover, that in the history of man's attitude to them they have shared a similar fate, probably it would be too much of a coincidence to suppose that their parallel decline has been unrelated. The remainder of this book, therefore, will be devoted to trying to show that modern man's inability to understand these somewhat similar forms of communication is the result of a disease. For, if in contrast to his ancestors he is unable to perceive any relevant or valid meaning in them, either he is right and they are meaningless, or he is wrong; but, if he is wrong, he is blind to certain things to which he should not be blind, which is equivalent to saying that he is suffering from a paralysis of his perceptive faculties; and paralysis is a disease. Before a disease can be cured, its nature must be diagnosed, and its cause must be understood. Much time and thought has been expended on attempts to discover the reasons for the decay of religious belief. Comparatively little of either has gone to isolating the cause of, or analysing the stages in, the creeping paralysis which has gradually atrophied man's faculty of artistic perception. Yet, simply because works of art are expressed solely in terms of imagery, metaphor, and symbol, the arts must provide the *locus classicus* in which to study both the nature of symbolism and any misuse or misunderstanding of it which may arise. Whereas, because religion — at least, the

Christian religion — is not concerned with symbolism only, but with history and material event as well, it provides a less suitable field for study. Moreover, by its very nature Christianity confronts a man with a challenge to belief or disbelief from which he cannot disengage himself in order to consider, dispassionately, the nature of the symbols in which much of the challenge is expressed. Indeed, the validity of the symbols constitutes precisely the crux of the challenge, and they cannot be considered apart from the position of potential acceptance or rejection, to which the considerer is already committed. Those that have ears to hear will hear to-day, just as they did in the days of Jesus. The problem is to discover what causes the deafness of so many of our contemporaries.

## ART AND BELIEF

ART is a broad term. In origin, the word derives from the Latin, *ars*, and thence from the Greek, ἀραρῶ, and its root, ἄρω, meaning basically 'to join together, to fit together'. It seems to have been used, primarily, in connection with the fitting together of things, and to have acquired the secondary meaning, 'to furnish, to equip, to set in order'.<sup>1</sup> But from the earliest times something more than material parts was set in order by the worker in what we call 'the fine arts'; for in primitive societies which were, by our standards, more or less intellectually inarticulate, the arts were the normal means by which ideas were coherently fitted together and communicated to others. So ideologies, to use the current term, were expressed in myth, poetry, painting, and sculpture, while other related ideas were realized and expressed in dance forms. In fact, primitive cosmologies and man's place in them were thought out and explained in artistic terms, not because the arts were a substitute for logical thinking, but simply because they were the only and the natural terms in which men thought and expressed themselves. An idea was not first 'thought out', in our sense of the words, and then expressed in artistic form. The making of the form constituted the thinking; and so, for the artist, it does to-day, for artistic expression is pre-logical. Thus art was, and is, simply the form and expression of belief.

However, before attempting to substantiate this statement, a distinction should perhaps be made between those forms of art, produced in all societies, which are primarily decorative, and those which are primarily communicative. Both types have existed from the earliest times. Herbert Read, discussing the difference between the geometric

<sup>1</sup> Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*.

art of the Neolithic age and the largely representational art of the Palaeolithic period, has said that "in decorating his pottery with geometric ornament, neolithic man was only moved by the desire to fill a space. *Horror vacui* is one of the permanent characteristics of man's psychology. We have an inborn desire, when making something, to break the blank surface of the object with some kind of ornament. The natural kind of ornament is one which arises in the process of manufacture — some development, for example, of the marks left by the flaking of stone, the adzing of wood, the weaving of fabrics. The first type of geometric art, therefore, arises from technical pursuits and is devoid of any aim to express ideas. But art as normally conceived is precisely the expression of ideas in form and fable, rhythm and colour. What I now wish to emphasize is the fact that even this second type of art, art expressing ideas, can take on a geometrical aspect. This will be made very clear by a consideration of the art of savage peoples. . . . It is characteristic of such works of art that they are not disinterested creations, like the ornaments on neolithic pottery, but objects made for ritualistic or cult purposes. That is to say, the savage . . . is representing, by plastic means, an idea. His cult or religion requires an idol, a mask, a totem — something which is not naturalistic, but symbolic."<sup>1</sup>

It could be argued that what Herbert Read calls man's "*horror vacui*" is, in itself, the expression of a deep, if unconscious, conviction that ultimate reality is ordered, not meaninglessly vacuous, and therefore that even pure pattern making is expressive of an idea. But, however this may be, what he says of "art as normally conceived" is true, not only in primitive societies, but in all societies. For the leading ideas which have governed the *ethos* of a particular society have been the 'truths' which have been realized, embodied, and expressed in its works of art. Even the passing fashion for 'art for art's sake', which, by express intention,

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Read, *Art and Society*, pp. 30, 31 (Wm. Heinemann Ltd., London, 1937).

was supposed to be inexpressive of any ideal content, provides a good example, of the thesis that the art of an age, in fact, expresses its leading ideas; for, in this case, the *ethos* of the day was precisely a *fin de siècle* disillusionment with all leading ideas — a vacuum of social and ideological purpose — which was most aptly expressed in its self-consciously vacuous artefacts. In consequence, the art of any given culture — particularly the plastic art which is more durable than its musical and literary counterparts — is a treasury reflecting the *ethos* of the parent society, and a study of its historical development will throw light upon the development of the leading ideas by which the society has lived. The *ethos* of the hieratic, monarchico-religious society of Pharaonic Egypt, for example, is embodied in Egyptian art so vividly that it is immediately distinguishable from the art of any other culture. In contrast, Roman society, which was ostensibly built, too, upon its myths, its hierarchy, and its divine Emperor, produced an art which is redolent of an *ethos* completely different from that of Pharaonic Egypt. In fact, the element in Roman art which rings most true is the secular hieratic element; for, just as in reality Roman culture was built on power, so it is in the eulogistic portraits of the military rulers of Rome that the essence of Roman art is to be found. The rest is more or less perfunctory or insincere. In still greater contrast, the art of Aztec Mexico is instinct with the terror and morbidity of its parent culture. Negro sculpture embodies the ideas of the tribe and its belief in the terrifying ubiquity and power of ancestral spirits; and other examples will spring to mind readily enough. But perhaps the most convincing demonstration of the culturally and credally expressive function of the arts is provided by the contrast between the arts of Greece and Israel. In the case of the former, its ebullient pantheism and humanism was expressed in its multitudinous statuary of gods and men, while in the case of the latter its strictly transcendental monotheism resulted in a total taboo upon material representation of all sorts; so that,

with a few late exceptions, there was no plastic art in Israel, as there is none in transcendentalist Islam to-day. Even though neither transcendentalism nor monotheism, in themselves, need necessarily lead to an exclusively non-plastic art, there could scarcely be a better demonstration of the influence of belief on art than this, provided by the arts of Greece and Israel.

Art, therefore, is the expression of ideas. It says something. But it does so in a manner peculiar to itself. As has already been said, it is not a substitute for logical expression, philosophy, discussion, or every-day speech. It is both less precise and more profound than these other means of communication. Indeed, it has been said that "art must be recognized as the most certain mode of expression which mankind has achieved. As such it has been propagated from the very dawn of civilization. In every age man has made things for his use, and followed thousands of occupations made necessary by his struggle for existence. He has fought endlessly for power and leisure, and for material happiness. He has created languages and symbols, and built up an impressive fund of learning; his resource and invention have never been exhausted. And yet all the time, in every phase of civilization, he has felt that what we call the scientific attitude is inadequate. The mind he has developed from his deliberate cunning can only cope with objective facts; beyond these objective facts is a whole aspect of the world which is accessible only to instinct and intuition. The development of these obscurer modes of apprehension has been the purpose of art; and we are nowhere near an understanding of mankind and of the history of mankind until we admit the significance and indeed the superiority of the knowledge embodied in art. We may venture to claim superiority for such knowledge because whilst nothing has proved so impermanent and provisional as that which we are pleased to call scientific fact and the philosophy built on it, art, on the contrary, is everywhere, in its highest manifestations, universal and eternal . . . Art is a mode of

expression, a language . . . to convey a meaning — by which I do not mean a message. In all its essential activities art is trying to tell us something: something about the universe, something about nature, about man, or about the artist himself. Art is a mode of knowledge, and the world of art is a system of knowledge as valuable to man — indeed, more valuable — than the world of philosophy or the world of science.”<sup>1</sup>

Of what kind is this language? Its method is to convey meaning by evocation rather than by exact description or direct statement; for the significance of a work of art is always more than the sum of the connotation of its individual parts. This is easy enough to see in the case of poetry; for, obviously, Shakespeare’s song “Come away, come away death”, is not a good poem because the sum total of the meanings of the individual words, phrases, and sentences is more startling, original, or profound than that of other statements. Indeed, it is doubtful whether such a phrase as “sad cypress” means anything at all by the strictly literal standards of normal verbal communication. On the contrary, it is an evocative image, and the value of the poem lies in the fact that it evokes in the reader an apprehension of something transcending the sum total of the connotations of the individual words and phrases of which it is composed. Indeed, a poem may be very nearly incomprehensible by normal standards without losing either its value or its poetic meaning.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, what is true of poetry is true of painting also. For example, a still life by Chardin is a work of art just precisely in so far as it is more than a faithful representation of a loaf, a bottle, a knife, and a white cloth; and much the same may be said of a portrait by Rembrandt of an old man, which, in its turn, is valuable only in so far

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Read, *op. cit.*, pp. xviii f.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the work by Manley Hopkins comes to mind, or lines such as these by Dylan Thomas:

“Do you not father me, nor the erected arm  
For my tall tower’s sake cast in her stone?  
Do you not mother me, nor, as I am,  
The lovers’ house, lie suffering my stain?”

as it is more than a faithful reproduction of an old man, feature by feature, and wrinkle by wrinkle. In short, the subject of a work of art points beyond itself and evokes in the spectator an apprehension of the meaning which it was the artist's purpose to convey; it does not contain it. Moreover, the meaning cannot be translated into terms other than those in which it is already expressed. You cannot write a prose essay to explain the meaning of Shakespeare's "Come away, come away death". You can only read the poem. The ineptitude of many concert programme 'blurbs' provides yet another example of the impossibility of translating an artistic statement into other terms.

What, then, is the nature of this meaning? What is art about? These questions may be answered more easily, if a preliminary question be answered first. What is the difference between a photograph and a work of art, a descriptive statement and a poem, a sound recording of the noise of the traffic in Piccadilly and a sonata? The answer is that the work of art, the poem, and the sonata find, realize, and express a transcendent order and harmony in and beyond the disorder and cacophony which alone is the subject of the camera, the prose description, and the sound recorder. The latter are, primarily, concerned with the world's surface phenomena. Works of art, on the contrary, are concerned with the underlying order of things: of the visible world, of mankind, of time, and of the relationship of these things one to another. If it were ultimately true to say that "life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"; if this were all that could be said of life, there could be no works of art. For, if life were bare futility, there could, for instance, be no tragedy. Instead, there would only be farce. The sense of tragedy arises when "this petty pace from day to day", with all its pain, and waste, and impermanence, is seen in its relationship to the working of inexorable purpose and transcendent order: indeed,

when it is seen to be, in some sense, the paradoxical affirmation of the realm of order; for it is in the harmony of confusion, in the sublimity of useless sacrifice, and in the inevitability of accident that the essence of tragedy lies. All art arises from, and is an expression of, this conviction that ultimate reality is ordered. The character of any particular artistic tradition is conditioned by the nature which is ascribed to this underlying order and to its governance. If it be looked upon as governed by the *mana*<sup>1</sup> of certain things, the art expressing this belief will be animistic or totemistic; if by God or the gods, religious; if by man or the 'spirit of Man', humanist; and so on. But however its essential nature may be conceived, it is this underlying order which is the 'object' of what Herbert Read calls the artists' obscure mode of apprehension. They take this to be a transcendent reality; and their work is 'about' this reality. They may, of course, be wrong in claiming 'objective' reality for the object of their experience. It may be a reality only in their own minds; but they believe it to be otherwise, and for the moment it does not matter whether they are right or wrong in this respect.

But it is important to realize that, 'real' or not, an artist's ideas about this transcendent realm can be truly and fully realized only in and by the production of the resulting work of art, and thereafter communicated to others by and through it. This is the process and purpose of artistic production: realization and communication of transcendent ideas concerning material reality. The work is the 'description' of the transcendent idea experienced. If it could be 'described' or communicated in other terms — those of ordinary speech, for example — there would be no need to make it the subject of a work of art. But the experience, itself — the kind of thing which happens to the poet, the painter, or the musician — can be described; indeed, there are many accounts of it, and they are very much alike in many respects.

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, the psychic concept with which material objects are endowed: *viz.*, the spirit of a tree, rock, or river.

They are almost unanimous in declaring it to be in some sense a revealing of something to the artist. In other words, the artist is primarily passive and only secondarily active; the artistic process is primarily an act of passive and receptive apprehension, and secondarily an inventive action, in which means to embody and express the received apprehension are forged. However, in practice these aspects of one activity are so closely fused together that it is almost impossible to disentangle them; for it is in the process of finding means of expression that the apprehension is fully explored and realized. "I am progressing very slowly," wrote Cézanne to Émile Bernard, "for nature reveals herself to me in very complex forms, and the progress needed is incessant."<sup>1</sup> In a previous letter to the same friend he had made it clear that what he meant by "nature" was "the spectacle that Pater Omnipotens Aeternae Deus spreads out before our eyes";<sup>2</sup> and it was when he was confronted with this spectacle that Cézanne was moved to paint. But he was not moved merely to copy this spectacle. "To succeed in formulating the sensations we experience in contact with this beautiful nature"<sup>3</sup> was Cézanne's particular aim, as it was his achievement. That is to say, he was moved to embody in paint his apprehension of something more than, beyond, and yet implicit in the material spectacle of the landscape in such a way that something more than, beyond, and yet implicit in the material spectacle of his completed painting would arouse similar 'sensations' in the beholder.

Thus, the work of the artist, poet, or musician is the business of symbol making. It is important to define the meaning of this word as it will be used in the remainder of this essay. The Greek root of the word, symbol, (συμβάλλω, ἢ συμβολή, τὸ σύμβολον) means 'a coming together'. It has largely lost this basic meaning in current usage to-day, for it is used so loosely that it often means nothing much more than an illustration or metaphor. In this sense, it is to

<sup>1</sup> *Paul Cézanne, Letters*, John Rewald ed., p. 235 (Bruno Cassirer, London, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 234.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 247.

be found in such common expressions as 'just a symbol' or 'mere symbolism'. Thus used, virtually it means something unreal; and a symbol is reduced to the status of an arbitrary or conventional sign. It has been said that, in this normal, colloquial usage to-day, symbols are treated as "mere conventions, something wholly incidental and extraneous: they are pragmatic in their origin and apart from their pragmatic use are mere illustrations. . . . Such to a certain extent is the symbolism of mathematics and of some scientific concepts. In this sense all science may be called 'symbolic'; yet this 'symbolism' is but a synonym for pragmatism or even subjectivism, for in as much as it is pragmatic, science must of necessity be subjective, 'psychological', though it has a foundation in the world of objective reality. The opposite to this 'symbolism' of conventional signs and pragmatic images is the symbolism of religion and art, which is indeed the prototype of all true symbolism. Here symbol denotes and represents (makes present) an invariable reality."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout this essay, the word will be used strictly in the latter sense, as describing something which denotes and makes present an invariable reality: that is to say, something in which there is a coming together of a material thing — a sensible phenomenon — with an immaterial and transcendent reality, whether that reality exists only in the form of an idea in the mind of the symbol-maker or in some more 'real' and objective form. For the sake of clarity, the material object will be called either the 'material component' of the symbol, or simply, the 'image'; the parts of the image will be called the 'imagery'; and the transcendent idea, 'real' or not, will be called, either the 'transcendent component', the 'transcendence', or the 'reality symbolized'. Moreover, since in poetry and music the images can only be called material objects by using the word, 'material', rather broadly, as far as possible the examples of artistic symbols discussed in the remainder of this essay will be

<sup>1</sup> Eugeny Lampert, *The Divine Realm*, pp. 109, 110 (Faber & Faber, London, 1944).

chosen from the plastic arts — painting and sculpture — whose images are unequivocally material. In an inquiry into the similarity between the symbols used, respectively, in theology and the arts, this will be an advantage, for many Christian symbols — the dominical sacraments, for instance — have their indubitably material components; and therefore the symbols used by painters and sculptors are, perhaps in this respect, nearer to theological symbols than are those used by poets or musicians.

To return to the experience of the artist: to make symbols, expressing and embodying his apprehension of something transcending the material spectacle around him, is the artist's task. So far, the impression may have been given that he creates his symbols *ex nihilo*; but, in fact, this is never the case. Even a man as revolutionary and inventive as Cézanne, who was one of the most remarkable inventors in the history of painting, began with the conventional apparatus and media of his day. "The Louvre is the book in which we learn to read," he said;<sup>1</sup> and from this book he learned his trade and its methods. His inventive achievement can be measured by the fact that he modified them as much as he did. But, usually, an artist takes over the generally accepted conventions and methods of his day and uses them with only the smallest degree of modification necessary to suit his own personal form of expression. That this is not the case to-day is true, but our own age is peculiar in this respect, and the nature and causes of its peculiarity will be discussed later. But that it is normal for artists to work freely and without creative frustration or expressive restraint within the framework of an accepted convention can be seen by looking at any of the great schools of art of the past. For example, the resemblances between an Egyptian carving of the fourth dynasty and one of the twenty-sixth — or even of the thirtieth — are more obvious than their differences. Sculptors worked without restriction within the limits of this one convention from 2800 B.C. until at least as late as

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 250.

600 B.C., and even until as late as 350 B.C. — a period of considerably more than two thousand years. Admittedly, there was development, and there was variation in the quality of the work produced during this time, but the basic style never changed. This persistent convention, however, was not a strait jacket within which creative work was paralysed. On the contrary, it provided an acceptable and accepted language in which artists could express, quite freely, that which they wished to express. The coming of Hellenistic civilization to Egypt eventually destroyed its Pharaonic culture, and with the death of the latter the style of art which had been designed to express its leading ideas and distinctive *ethos* died too. The new Hellenistic ideas were inexpressible in terms of the old style. In the arts, too, new wine bursts old bottles.

In more recent times, the longevity and fertility of the Byzantine style has provided another example of an accepted and persistent tradition within which artists managed to work freely for a very long time: indeed, from the fourth to the seventeenth centuries, for this style did not die in the Balkans until several centuries after its disappearance in such places as Northern Italy. Once again, there was considerable development, and there was variation in quality, but the basic relationship between the works produced in this manner is so evident that it is impossible to mistake a Byzantine product for the product of any other school. Moreover, Byzantine art provides refutation, if such be needed, of the theory which has sometimes been propounded that a style is the result of national or racial characteristics. Certainly, in so far as a national or racial group creates its own distinctive *ethos*, its works of art will be distinguishable from those of other groups; but this must still be attributed to the *ethos* in which the group lives rather than to any supposed characteristic of their blood. For, at one time, the Byzantine style was common to all the ethnic groups living in the area which extends from Russia in the North to Greece and Southern Italy and westwards to these islands,

where Romanesque wall painting — a branch of the Byzantine tree — flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

But there is a radical difference between the artist, on the one hand, who, freely and without restraint, creates vital symbols with the traditional apparatus which he inherits from the past, and, on the other hand, the man who produces *pastiche*: that is to say, second-hand work in slavish imitation of the works of others. The difference between the living works of the former and the dead productions of the latter reflects, and is a result of, the difference between the respective foci of their attention. For the creative artist, as has been said, makes his symbols by concentrating upon the transcendent 'object' of his apprehension, whatever it may be; and, in the process of this concentration, he expresses and embodies his apprehension of it in a material image. But the *pasticheur* fixes his attention, not upon a transcendence in the reality of which he believes, but upon the material imagery of other artists whose works he wishes to imitate. The resulting work of *pastiche* can never be a symbol, for it will have no transcendent component. On the contrary, it is bound to be merely a material copy of a material object, and it will draw attention to itself instead of leading the mind of the spectator to a transcendent idea beyond the image.

This may sound rather complicated and abstruse when it is stated in the abstract, but it is easy enough to understand in practice. Byzantine artists, working within the tradition and with the conventions of their time, made mosaic figures of angels. Because their minds were fixed upon a transcendent idea in the reality of which they firmly believed, their finished mosaics are living symbols and works of art. Similarly, Fra Angelico, working in Florence at a time when the Byzantine tradition was dying in Italy, also painted angels. His imagery, though still rooted in the Byzantine tradition which he had inherited, was no longer drawn wholly from traditional sources, for Fra Angelico worked partly in terms of tradition and partly in terms of his own original modification of the received convention: but his

work, too, is a work of art and a living symbol of the transcendent idea upon which his mind was fixed.

In contrast to these people, modern painters, however good, find it impossible to make anything of angels. If they are commissioned to do so, they will incorporate angels in their works; but the results invariably fall into one of two categories. Either they are the pale, academic, and lifeless descendants of the traditional winged figures of early Renaissance imagination; or they are merely the central *motif* of a decorative theme. In the former case, the results are so insipid that they are meaningless, as were — to take another example of a concept from which belief was withdrawn with the same lethal consequence for its artistic embodiment — the eighteenth century representations of Apollo. Kenneth Clark has pointed out that, by this time, "Apollo, with all those beliefs which clustered round his name, had lost his place in the human imagination; and the husk of Apollo alone remained to provide a meaningless discipline in the academies of art."<sup>1</sup> So, to-day, the husk of angels may provide a meaningless discipline, but no more than that, in the studios and workshops of those who are commissioned to adorn our churches. Sometimes, however, the artists seek escape from this situation by treating angels merely as the central theme of a piece of decoration. For at least, in this way, they can produce something lively instead of something moribund, and the dead hand of academic formulation can be avoided. But in this latter case, as in the case of the engraved glass panels in Coventry Cathedral, the result will be essentially decorative, no different in kind from the pieces of *décor* which one might expect to find in restaurants or theatres. It would be as difficult to mistake it for a statement about angels, as it would be to mistake the floral theme of a Persian carpet for a statement about flowers.

Meanwhile, the situation will be even worse if the work be entrusted to a normal firm of church furnishers. For if a

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude*, p. 62 (John Murray, 1956).

wood-carver, for example, employed by such a firm, is commissioned to make the figures of four angels for a set of riddle posts, he will not concentrate upon any transcendent reality in which he believes; on the contrary, he will fix his attention, either upon works of the past, or — more probably and even more disastrously — upon other second-hand works of the present: in other words, upon the accepted conventional manner of producing this particular piece of church furniture. He will not be interested in angels. He will be interested in the form of the particular ecclesiastical *bric-à-brac* which purports to represent angels. Thus, he will produce neither a symbol nor a work of art but a meaningless object — a piece of dead *pastiche* — which will stand in a church as a perpetual monument to the unbelief of its maker and as a permanent deterrent to belief in angels. For no one in their senses will believe in angels which are presented as actually being material objects similar to the carvings on riddle posts. So, where a living symbol would have drawn attention to a transcendent idea beyond its image, and would have challenged the spectator to belief or unbelief in that transcendent idea, *pastiche* can only initiate or confirm incredulity.

Self-consciousness and craft-consciousness, therefore, are lethal to art; for the attention of the artist must be fixed upon the 'object' of his apprehension if his work is to live. This explains the extraordinary vitality of the work of 'Sunday painters' and of children whose minds are concerned, not with means, manner, or technical method, but only with whatever it may be that they are representing. But children, nevertheless, are limited by their ignorance of technique, so that, if they are to become mature artists, they must first learn how to use their material. During their apprenticeship, unless they are very exceptional, they will become *pasticheurs*, and their work will lose much of its vitality and spontaneity. They can recover these qualities only by learning their technique so thoroughly that, thereafter, they can work without paying any conscious attention to it. Cézanne,

to quote him once more, said of another painter that he was "an intellectual crushed by the memory of the museums . . . The great thing is to make oneself free of the school and indeed of all schools."<sup>1</sup> The fact that even the most mature of painters does not always fully succeed in doing this can be seen in the contrast which so often exists between the vitality of an artist's sketches and the comparatively moribund atmosphere of his finished works. Much of the immediacy of Constable's sketches, for instance, is lacking in his 'finished' pictures because, when he was painting the latter, he was more concerned with perfecting their images than he was when he was painting the sketches for them.

If the making of symbols is rendered impossible when the artist's attention is misguidedly fixed upon their material components, in the same way, the understanding of them will be impossible to the spectator who allows his attention to be absorbed by the images instead of permitting it to be passed through and by them to their transcendent components. Much so-called 'appreciation' of art is, in fact, either admiration of technical prowess or judgement by rule of thumb: that is to say, judgement by the kind of criterion which pronounces a work to be good, if it possesses certain easily recognized technical qualities or forms, and bad if these are absent. Hogarth castigated this kind of 'appreciation' in his own day. The eighteenth century rule of thumb which he so disliked had the merit of simplicity, however, for it was the simple expedient of admiring everything in the Italian baroque manner. "I think that young men by studying in Italy have seldom learnt much more than the names of the painters; though sometimes they have attained the amazing power of distinguishing styles, and knowing by the hue of the picture the hard name of the artist, a power which, highly as they pride themselves upon it, is little more than knowing one hand-writing from another. For this they gain great credit, and are supposed vast proficients, because they have travelled. They are

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 268.

gravely attended to by people of rank, with whom they claim acquaintance, and talk of the antique in a cant phraseology, made up of half or whole Italian, to the great surprise of their hearers, who, become gulls, in order to pass for connoisseurs, wonder with a foolish face of praise, and bestow unqualified admiration on the marvellous bad copies of marvellous bad originals, which they have brought home as trophies, and triumphantly display, to prove their discernment and taste."<sup>1</sup>

This kind of spurious connoisseurship was not confined to the eighteenth century. Roger Fry pointed to the Greek statuary which, at one time was imported into this country by the ton, and cited it as the object of the same sort of indiscriminate adulation. "After the Renaissance the supreme value of Classic Sculpture became a dogma universally accepted — from 1500 to 1800 it would probably have been impossible to find any dissentient voice, and throughout the nineteenth century relatively few heretical doubters could be found. This dogma was believed so whole-heartedly and so uncritically that almost anything that could claim to derive from Greece, even through Roman copies, inspired profound admiration. Under the compulsion of this dogma many cultured English noblemen made collections of Classical sculptures at great expense and enjoyed universal admiration for their enlightened taste — and yet when, in the later nineteenth century, the systematic study of Classical art was at last undertaken, it became quite evident that most of these admired masterpieces were second- and third-rate copies largely restored by eighteenth and nineteenth century forgers. And many of these statues which had received the votive offerings of generations of *conoscenti* are now relegated to remote corridors or fulfil a more humble and appropriate service as little noticed garden ornaments." Fry went on to say that he, himself, had lived "long enough to see what we may call the 'focus of appreciation' shift from one period to another. When I was young all

<sup>1</sup> William Hogarth, quoted by R. H. Wilenski, *English Painting*, p. 23 (Faber & Faber, London, 1933).

Greek art of the fifth century B.C. was sacred. One did not ask 'Is that a beautiful statue?'; one asked, 'Is it of the fifth century?' and the answer to that question sanctioned or forbade one's enthusiasm. Fourth century work, however attractive, was to be austere shunned as being decadent. On the other hand, our appreciation was allowed to stray backwards to the later archaic work — it was still not quite 'the thing' but it was admirable in its own honest, if slightly incompetent, way. This process went on until, little by little, the enthusiasm for the archaic period became more vocal and more sincere than that felt for the once supreme century."<sup>1</sup>

All this means, in effect, that there can never be an objective standard of judgement in the arts, simply because that which is to be judged is never a mere object. This conclusion does not satisfy our own age, for it is an age which seeks objective standards in everything; but in the arts it cannot have them, as Hegel realized. "The reflective culture of our life to-day," he wrote, "makes it inevitable, relatively both to our volitional power and our judgement, that we adhere strictly to general points of view, and regulate particular matters in consonance with them so that universal forms, laws, duties, rights, and maxims hold valid as the determining basis of our life and the force within of main importance. What is demanded for artistic interest as well as for artistic creation is, speaking in general terms, a vital energy in which the universal is not present as law and maxim, but is operative in union with soul and emotions, just as also, in the imagination, what is universal and rational is enclosed only as brought into unity with a concrete sensuous phenomenon."<sup>2</sup> Objective judgements, therefore, can be made only of images; and this is precisely to miss the point of them, if they be the material components of genuine works of art: symbols. In consequence, the gradual decline of a school of art or manner of painting has often

<sup>1</sup> Roger Fry, *Last Lectures*, pp. 7, 8 (C.U.P., 1939).

<sup>2</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. by F. P. Osmaston, Vol. 1, pp. 12, 13 (London, 1920).

been inversely proportional to the gradual rise of a belief that, at last, an 'objective' understanding of its values has been, or is being, reached; for, as both artists and critics have become more and more sure that they understand the rules governing the perfection of a manner — rules of composition, *chiaroscuro*, harmony, draughtsmanship, anatomy, texture, technique, and the like — so confrontation with, and apprehension of, any transcendence on the part of either the artist or the spectator has been progressively replaced by creation and judgement by maxim, law, or rule of thumb. The rise of such an attitude to the arts seems to be bound up with the emergence of a self-conscious respect for the arts as 'Art'. In a society such as that of ancient Egypt or Byzantine Christendom, where the arts were not regarded self-consciously, but were looked upon as symbolic forms of religious expression, these conditions so lethal to symbol-making did not arise, even though rules of a sort governed the work of their artists. For instance, late Byzantine mosaicists were enjoined by ecclesiastical *fiat* to make their representations of Christ conform to certain requirements, and they had to place him in certain prescribed positions in the decoration of a church. But this was a rule designed to promote, not the artistic merit of the mosaic, but the honour of Christ; and since the majesty of Christ was the transcendent idea, of which the mosaic was the material image, this rule actually helped to draw the attention of both the mosaicist and the spectator to the right quarter.

To conclude and to summarize these general remarks, art is a language which conveys meaning by symbols. More precisely, it is a number of languages; for each school of art — Coptic, Bushman, Byzantine, or Aztec, as the case may be — is formed in order to express the particular leading ideas of the parent society. Any one of these particular languages will cease to be used when the leading ideas, which it was formed to express, cease to inspire the society in which they arose, or when they are replaced by others, as was the case, for example, when the Spanish conquerors

destroyed the Aztec civilization in Mexico. What is even more important to mark, however, is the fact that the symbols in any given language will inevitably die when their images are treated as ends in themselves, for then they will no longer be able to symbolize: that is to say, they will no longer be able to direct the attention to a transcendent component. So that, when the material components of symbols are treated as self-sufficient in themselves — as facts in their own right — the general symbolism of which they are the parts will sicken and, eventually, die.

With these general remarks upon the nature of art and the determinative conditions of the life and death of symbols in mind, perhaps the particular rise and development of Christian art and its relationship to theology may be better understood. Obviously, however, within the limits of an essay of this kind, only an outline of the main features of so great a subject can be traced; for a full study of the origins, development, and decay of Christian art would require many large volumes for its elaboration. Omissions and generalizations, therefore, there must be, and those people who object to generalizations will find much to dislike in the following chapters. But, unless the very existence of a general and recognizable line of development in the art of Europe from Roman beginnings through the maturity of the Renaissance to the rather dreary products of the Victorian age be altogether denied, the purpose of this brief essay will not be frustrated by its concentration upon generalities and its omission of many details. For it is precisely the nature of the slow change and development in the main stream of Christian art — its character and cause — that is the concern of this inquiry; and while the riches and diversity of the art of this long period are immeasurable, too great a concentration upon them might divert attention from the slow, over-all transformation through which European art has passed and which it is the purpose of this essay to study, especially in its relationship to the developing doctrine and theology of the Church.

## ICONOGRAPHY

EVERY school of art has its roots in one or more schools of the past, and early Christian art was no exception. For the first two centuries of its existence, so far as is known, the Church produced no significant pictorial or plastic expression of its faith; at least, none has survived, and probably there was none. It is much more likely that the new Israel was true to the tradition which it had inherited from the old, and that it shunned pictorial and plastic representation as being idolatrous. Clement of Alexandria said that "it has been plainly forbidden us to practise deceptive art; for the prophet says, 'Thou shalt not make the likeness of anything that is in heaven, or in the earth beneath.'"<sup>1</sup> But this taboo upon representation did not survive Constantine's adoption of the Church and the subsequent wholesale immigration into it of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds; and in the third century works of art depicting Christian persons, themes, and stories began to appear in increasing numbers. These early works show traces of their parentage very clearly; for, far from there being anything peculiarly Christian about them, apart from their titles and their subject matter, they are indistinguishable in style from pagan works of the same date. This is not surprising, for artists wishing to express a new ideology can only adopt the manners which are available to them in their own time, and then adapt them to their own purposes; and the process of adaptation is a very slow one.

On the whole, early Christian iconographers inherited an uninspiring and unpropitious stock-in-trade. Not only were the arts languishing in the heat of the same syncretism which was withering the pagan religions of the day, but the known

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Herbert Read, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

world was dominated by a power which, with no artistic tradition of any great value of its own and an avowed contempt for the arts in general, made good its cultural deficiency by plundering the countries which it conquered of their works of art merely in order to enhance its imperial prestige. However, after the conquest of Greece, the harvest of looted Greek statues had promoted a fashion for such things amongst the Romans, not unlike the fashion for all things Greek which arose among the English gentry of a later date. A demand for Greek art was thus created, and supply followed demand. A Roman firm, the Cometii, set up factories throughout Greece, where journeyman sculptors manufactured innumerable statues in the Greek taste for the Roman market, and Italy was flooded with Greek *pastiche*. But, while there was no indigenous tradition of any great value in Italy, there was a school of naturalistic portrait sculpture which was representational in method and eulogistic in intention, and there was an affiliated school of prosaic narrative sculpture and painting, which achieved a certain vigour, even if it lacked both sensitivity and distinction. The portraits of Emperors and other eminent Roman citizens and the scenes adorning the base of many triumphal arches and columns, are familiar examples of the products of these two schools. In addition, there was a school of picturesque landscape painting with a predilection for romantic architectural features, which had flourished especially at Pompeii before its destruction; and it, too, had a certain charm even if the level of its achievement was never very high.

But more significant than these native Italian schools was a school of art which had its origin either in Syria or Asia Minor. Wherever it may have begun — and there is disagreement about its birth-place — it was certainly Eastern in genesis and character; and, in the early Christian era, it had not succumbed as completely as the other schools to the prevalent intellectual humanism or to the artistic decadence of the Hellenistic world. In intention, it remained

expressive of ideas rather than merely expressive of appearance: descriptive of people and events. The influence of this school spread to Egypt where, except in Alexandria which was a stronghold of neo-classicism, it seems to have ousted all rivals. It produced some lovely and lively things, of which the portraits painted on the lids of mummy cases are probably the best known. These paintings have a directness of touch, a spontaneity, a vigour, and a liveliness which influenced the later development of Christian iconography, as may be seen when the works of the two schools are compared; and it is probable, too, that the brilliance of the colour, and its inventiveness, had its effect upon early Christian artists. Finally, there was another school — or sub-school — which contributed to the early development of Christian iconography. Sometime during, or shortly after, the making of the Septuagint in Alexandria, it was illustrated by local artists. The original illustrations have not survived, but they seem to have been copied frequently and disseminated widely, for a well-developed iconography of the O.T. was spread throughout the synagogues of the dispersion in the East by the beginning of the third century. The mural paintings in the Synagogue at Dura on the upper Euphrates are examples of it.<sup>1</sup>

From this hotchpotch of pagan and, on the whole, decadent styles Christian iconographers had, perforce, to make a Christian style: that is to say a pictorial and plastic means of realizing, embodying, and expressing the leading ideas of the Christian community. It is not surprising that their first attempts met with little success, or that the earliest works depicting Christian themes are quite indistinguishable from pagan works of the same period. In fact, it was not until about the middle of the fifth, or the beginning of the sixth, century that a Christian style began to emerge with sufficient clarity as to be recognizable. Referring to these earliest

<sup>1</sup> D. Talbot Rice, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, p. 67 and *passim* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1957). Those who wish to study the development of Christian art in detail could not do better than to consult this recent book.

attempts at Christian iconography, Professor Talbot Rice has said that "iconographically the fact that they are Christian is not always easy to distinguish. The Evangelists thus resemble pagan philosophers, while our Lord takes on the character of a classical divinity. He was usually shown with long hair and youthful appearance, like an Apollo."<sup>1</sup> More often than not, he was beardless; sometimes he was plump, unprepossessing, and undistinguished; in scenes depicting the Good Shepherd — a favourite theme — he looked like Hermes, as he does in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia at Ravenna, for example; while in a panel on the mid-fourth century Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in the crypt of St. Peter's in Rome, he might almost be mistaken for a dissolute Emperor or young patrician.

But internal forces were at work from the beginning, even if they were slow to make their mark, upon these adopted pagan styles from which Christian artists, *faute de mieux*, were attempting to forge a Christian iconography and style; and eventually the borrowed styles were welded and transformed into one new style: the Byzantine. Although it has often been treated as such in the past, the Byzantine style is not merely a decadent survival of Hellenism, but a new thing. It has been said that the history of Byzantine culture has "suffered more from depreciation and neglect than that of any other phase of European culture. The modern study of history has taken its departure from two points — from the history of classical antiquity and from that of the modern European nationalities — and anything which failed to fit into this scheme was disregarded or misunderstood. Even the greatest of our historians of the Eastern Empire — Edward Gibbon — shows a complete lack of sympathy for its culture; to him it is simply an appendix to Roman history, while his Victorian successor, Finlay, regards it mainly as an introduction to the history of modern Greece. In reality, the Byzantine culture is not merely a decadent survival from the classical past; it is a new

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

creation."<sup>1</sup> So, too, is Byzantine art; and the forces which formed it were doctrinal. For, however unsuitable the adopted pagan styles may have been to the task, what Christian iconographers wanted to represent was not history but what the Germans call *Heilsgeschichte*.

At first, they had no pictorial language in which to say what they wanted to say: no graphic symbols with which to represent what they wanted to represent; for their basic concern was not with imaginary reconstructions of Jesus of Nazareth, even if, at first, these were what they produced, but with representations of the *logos* incarnate. The same thing was true of their attitude to the apostles, the saints, the Evangelists, and the other figures of the faith. For instance, they did not represent Mary as she is so often represented to-day, as the archetype of faithful, loving, tender motherhood. Indeed, such sentimental humanism would have been as exotic to the age of the Nestorian controversy as the pictures in a modern 'Child's Bible' would have been out of place in the catacombs. Instead, they represented her as the *Theotokos*. There is explicit confirmation of this, if the suggestion be correct that certain mosaics of the Virgin in Sta Maria Maggiore in Rome were commissioned by Sixtus III in the latter part of the fifth century in order to reinforce the refutation by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431 of Nestorian teaching concerning Mary. But, whether this be correct or not, it is certain that works of art were regarded primarily as means of teaching and as expressions of belief. Since the conventions which the first artists adopted were quite inadequate to such didactic and expressive ends, the conventions had to be changed.

In effect, this meant that the methods of effete Hellenistic naturalism, expressing, as they did, the decadent Greek humanism of the day, had to be radically transformed. So iconography became less and less naturalistic in both colour and form, less and less illusionary in intention and effect,

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe*, p. 103 (Sheed & Ward, London, 1939).

and less and less concerned with the idealized humanity of the Greek and Roman temples. It never became abstract, for an abstract pictorial art, if it is to express anything at all and is not to be primarily decorative like a Persian carpet, can only express a pure transcendentalism which has little or no contact with the world of sensible appearance; and therefore abstract art would have been as unsuitable a vehicle of Christian belief as pure naturalism. Instead, Christian artists concentrated upon the 'point' at which the incarnation took place: the point of meeting and union between God and man, eternity and time, spirit and stuff, the transcendent and the material. The vigorous narrative manner of Roman art was put to work narrating the great events of salvation in history, but no longer in its originally prosaic way, for it was profoundly modified by the expressiveness of the Antiochene and the Egyptian schools. In the representations of Christ, for example, the beardless Greek boy made way for a bearded figure of Syro-Hittite heritage. He was given more and more pictorial emphasis; he was marked out by the colour of his clothes and a large nimbus with a red cross upon it; he tended to grow in size; and he was placed at the focal point of the design, so that the attention of the spectator was drawn to him. In fact, speculative reconstructions of the Jesus of history were replaced by symbols of the Christ of Chalcedonian dogma and Christian faith.

Meanwhile, the picturesque style of Pompeii, with its penchant for landscape and architecture, played a part in producing the formal and fascinating pictorial world of the icons and the mosaics, where figures move in a landscape which is neither real nor unreal, neither natural nor unrecognizable. It is a strange world which is *sui generis*: portentous, evocative, and as charged with mystery as a dream; but it is always a world which seems more real than reality. As to the figures which move in this quietly luminous landscape of sombre golden skies, sharply architectural rock, and cities unrestricted by the mundane rules of perspective, they are not merely apostolic men, prophetic men,

and martyred men; they are temples of the Holy Ghost, mouthpieces of the word of God, citizens of the heavenly places; in fact, they are new creatures wandering in the landscape of a new creation.

So, eventually, illusionary naturalism was replaced by evocative symbolism, the imagery of which was determined, in its nature and detailed elaboration, by considerations of transcendent belief rather than by the dictates of historical reminiscence, physical fact, or natural verisimilitude. Moreover, this symbolism was not confined to individual pictures, for in later Byzantine art<sup>1</sup> the whole interior decoration of a church was conceived symbolically as representative of the threefold universe with the heaven above, the earth beneath, and paradise between. Theologically determined rules governed the placing of the figures, and those of Christ or the Virgin usually occupied the highest points in the church; below them, bridging the gap between heaven and earth, came the figures of apostles, prophets, saints, and representations of events from the gospel story; while on the lowest level appeared figures of bishops, founders of churches, patron kings and donors, and other ordinary mortals. In this way, the whole three-dimensional space of the church became the 'picture plane' and was incorporated into the theme of decoration; for the figures represented were not thought of as being confined to their wall surfaces, but as regarding each other from their respective positions on the walls — or, rather, as regarding the most sacred person present across the intervening space — and the worshipper, who entered the church, found himself moving within a symbol of the Christian cosmos.<sup>2</sup> This concentration upon the interior splendour of the church was, in itself, significant. In the Greek and Roman worlds, the temples had been the homes of the gods, and only the priests had

<sup>1</sup> The fully developed system here described had its origin in the twelfth century in a church built during the reign of Basil II.

<sup>2</sup> Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, pp. 14 f. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1948),

entered them. Their decoration had been on the exterior looking out over the world which was man's home and the playground of the gods. But in the Byzantine world the Church was man's home. Christians looked to it as the place where lay their only true citizenship; for here the annual cycle of the liturgy re-enacted the drama of their redemption; and here, too, their faith and their hope were externalized in every detail of gesture, ceremonial, mosaic, and architecture.

In such ways, the adopted pagan styles with which Christian artists had begun to work were modified and transformed into a single instrument of Christian purpose. This purpose was achieved only after centuries of experiment and vicissitude which cannot be described in detail here. Up to the time of the first flowering of Byzantine art in the sixth and seventh centuries, the Hellenic tradition was very much alive, and there is a grace and an airiness about the works of this period which is inherited from Greece. The mosaics which once decorated Santa Sophia must have resembled those of San Vitale at Ravenna and have exemplified this stage in Byzantine development. The fall of the Western Empire in the fifth century, followed by dark years of chaos, dissolution, and despair, left the East to continue alone the cultural and artistic development of the Church. But the East had troubles of its own. There had always been a strongly Monophysite tendency in certain kinds of oriental Christianity which distrusted the whole system of Hellenic dogma, because it appeared to put limits to a purely transcendental monotheism. The apostasy of so many large sections of the Eastern Church during the first Islamic conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries was made possible — and, indeed, easy — by this deeply-rooted, if vague and formless, oriental monotheism. The same prejudice may have contributed to the outbreak of the Iconoclastic controversy, for Leo the Isaurian, who was elected Emperor in the East in A.D. 717, had been born in the Syrian province of Commagene which was a stronghold of the Paulician heresy. All that is known for certain of the Paulicians is that they

refused to reverence the Cross; but it is highly probable that they rejected other kinds of pictorial and sculptural representation too,<sup>1</sup> and Leo may have been influenced by their ideas. However this may have been, much of the early part of his reign was spent in struggles with Islam, and in A.D. 722 he engaged in another tussle with obstinate monotheists, when he tried to enforce the baptism of all Jews and Montanists in his realm; so that, if anyone was in a position to realize the strength of the oriental aversion to anything which savoured of idolatry, it was Leo III. Consequently, in A.D. 725, he inaugurated an official policy of Iconoclasm, and the development of Christian art was checked in the East too.

But, after the final revocation of Iconoclasm in A.D. 843, Byzantine art entered into its second Golden Age, and the artists were "carried away into a transcendental world of religious ecstasy, seeming to have forgotten that it was Christ alone who rose from the dead and that the Apostles were still alive at the time."<sup>2</sup> Their work reflected a profound transformation of the social ideology which had taken place during the hundred years of Iconoclasm; for much of the cultural and political heritage of the ancient world had been lost in the crises through which the Empire had passed, and the life and thought of Byzantine society had been deeply influenced by the kind of oriental transcendentalism against which it had been fighting, even though it had been struggling against it. So, while the recovery of the Empire and the revocation of Iconoclasm was a triumph for humanism over the pure transcendentalism of Iconoclasm, post-Iconoclastic society was, nevertheless, far more transcendentially minded and far less humanist than the society of pre-Iconoclastic days. The artists of the time faithfully reflected this. It has been said of them that their achievement was to realize and express the kind of faith which was

<sup>1</sup> J. Tixeront, *Histoire des Dogmes Dans L'Antiquité Chrétienne*, tom iii p. 452, n. 1 (J. Gabalda, Paris, 1928).

<sup>2</sup> D. Talbot Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

defined by the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, for almost they seem to have painted and fixed in mosaic "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen". The men and women whom they represented in their works are not portrayed in terms of what St Paul called "the natural body", but rather in terms of "the spiritual body"; they are people whose "mortal nature" seems already to have "put on immortality".<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the transcendent has never been more vividly or more splendidly expressed than it was by the Byzantine symbol-makers of this period, even if, later, their achievement was equalled, on the one hand, by the great Gothic builders of the North and, on the other, by such a man as the Russian, André Rublev. But the eminent isolation of such a fifteenth century master as Rublev only serves to draw attention to an aspect of the Byzantine achievement which, in common with the Gothic, is, by our standards, amongst its most astonishing features: namely, the number, excellence, and anonymity of the workmen who contributed to it.

For Byzantine art was not produced by a succession of great masters — by a series of highly talented and famous individuals — but by a school of anonymous servants of the Church. They were servants in the very real sense that they worked to express the beliefs of the Church as these were formulated by its theologians; whereas, at a later date, individual painters tended to impose the dazzling forms of their own vision upon the beliefs of the Church, even if they did so unwittingly and with the tacit consent and encouragement of the ecclesiastical authorities. In contrast to later European art, too, Byzantine art was remarkably homogeneous. One needs only to look at the differences between a Van Eyck and a Rubens to see how very much greater were the internal dissimilarities of style in the Flemish school over a period of about a hundred and fifty years than were those in the Byzantine school over a much longer period.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* W. Weidlé, *Les Icones Byzantines et Russes* (Electa Editrice, Florence, 1950).

Whereas the Flemish school was only a school in the broadest sense — it could be described more appropriately as being composed of a number of very dissimilar painters who happened to share the same domicile — the Byzantine school was an integrated body of like-minded workmen bound together by a common belief in a common cause.

As such, Byzantine art reflects the unity of the Christian idea and the passion with which it was held at this time; for, however much dissension and disagreement there may have been in Christendom, it was a time during which the tide of Greek naturalism was everywhere on the ebb. Throughout this whole period, the world was in flight from the sensual humanism of Hellenistic society and the materialism of the declining Roman Empire. With their backs turned upon the terrestrial world, men sought and found their security and their fulfilment in the austerities of monastic renunciation and in the transcendental world of the liturgy. In the West, Augustine was representative of more than his own time and place when, in his *De Civitate Dei*, he condemned the terrestrial world as unsubstantial and transitory, urging men to contemplate the heavenly Jerusalem where alone they might find peace. The writings of Gregory the Great reflect the same despair of this world. "Where is the Senate? Where is the People? The bones are all dissolved, the flesh is consumed, all the pomp of the dignities of this world is gone . . . For the Senate is no more, and the People has perished, yet sorrow and sighing are multiplied daily among the few that are left. Rome is, as it were, already burning and empty. But what need is there to speak of men when, as the work of ruin spreads, we see the very buildings perishing."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in the East, the works of such men as Ephraim the Syrian and Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite were turning men's eyes away from the world towards the ineffable mystery of the "divine darkness" of God. Their teaching fell upon willing ears, for the age was

<sup>1</sup> *Hom. in Ezech.*, II, vi, pp. 22-3, trans. Dudden, quoted by C. Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

passionately, even obsessively, theological. It has been said that "it is not possible to understand the Byzantine culture if we look at it only from the economic or the political point of view. For, to a greater extent than that of any other European society, its culture was a religious one and found its essential expression in religious forms . . . The modern European is accustomed to look on society as essentially concerned with the present life, and with material needs, and on religion as an influence on the moral life of the individual. But to the Byzantine, and indeed to mediaeval man in general, the primary society was the religious one, and economic and secular affairs were a secondary consideration . . . No less an authority than Gregory Nazianzen has described how, if you went into a shop in Constantinople to buy a loaf, 'the baker, instead of telling you the price, will argue that the Father is greater than the Son. The money-changer will talk about the Begotten and the Unbegotten, instead of giving you your money, and if you want a bath the bath-keeper assures you that the Son surely proceeds from nothing.'"<sup>1</sup>

It was inevitable that in this intensely theological climate there should have been local and temporary aberrations of doctrine, both towards the materialism of iconolatry, and towards the transcendentalism of iconoclasm; but there can be little doubt that it was the steady purpose and intention of the Church, as it was of the artists who served her, to avoid these extremes and, in the words of the Second Council of Nicaea in A.D. 787, to ensure that "the beholder (of images) be aroused to recollect the originals and to long after them . . . not to pay them (the images) actual worship".<sup>2</sup> Thus, the aim of this period was precisely to make symbols, and thereafter, to use them, but not to abuse them. On the whole, this aim was realized. There has been a tendency to write as though the men of this period had

<sup>1</sup> C. Dawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-11 *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 130 (O.U.P., 1943).

oscillated from the extreme of idolatrous superstition to the opposite pole of puritanical iconophobia; whereas, in fact, the artists of no other period of comparable duration have been more successful in the almost impossibly difficult task of Christian iconography. It is both unjust and unperceptive to dismiss Byzantine art as the insignificant parent of Gothic splendour and early Renaissance glory, in much the same way as one might dismiss Carlo Buonaparte as the unimportant and undistinguished father of Napoleon, even if it be true that neither Gothic nor Renaissance art could have arisen had there been no Byzantine school. The most that can be said in criticism of its achievement is that, during the second Golden Age, it soared to a height of such symbolic clarity and splendour that its position was very difficult to maintain. So rarefied was the atmosphere in the region to which it climbed, and where it hovered between the unattainably transcendent and the earthly material, that it was almost inevitable that Christian art would not be able to remain poised there for ever. In fact, during and after the eleventh century, as the Eastern Empire became more and more distraught by external dangers and pressure, the main tradition of Byzantine art hid itself away from a crumbling world in the restricted fastness of such retreats as Mount Athos, where it tended to dwindle, to harden into a formula, and to lose almost all touch with the material world. Even though there was a revival in the fourteenth century, Byzantine art declined steadily, so that, long before the Ottoman Turks finally destroyed the last vestige of Byzantine power, the responsibility for the cultural heritage of the Christian world had passed to the West, whose artists, far from losing touch with the material world, swooped down to *terra firma* in the most breath-taking and superb movement in the artistic history of the world.

## ICONOLATRY

IT is unnecessary to try to trace here in detail the development of Christian art in the West during the Dark Ages, and it would be impossible to do so within the prescribed limits of this book. All that needs to be said is that, although, artistically, the Church was very nearly dormant in this period, work was never entirely at a standstill. In part, the art of the day was a continuation and a development of the earliest Roman Christian art, such as that in the catacombs. In part, it was imported from the Byzantine Empire, for Greek artists were brought from the East throughout this whole time;<sup>1</sup> and, in part, it was a product of cross-fertilization of the Mediterranean strain by the indigenous styles of the Northern countries where the Church had taken root. Thus, for instance, in the seventh and eighth centuries a Celtic Christian school grew up in the British Isles under the influence of works of art imported by such missionaries as Columba and Augustine; and, similarly, in the ninth and tenth centuries, a characteristically Germanic branch of the Byzantine tree flourished in the Carolingian Empire.

The concern of this chapter, however, is not with these beginnings, but with the change that came over Christian iconography and symbolism in the West at the time of the Renaissance. The nature of this change can best be described as being a progressive humanizing of the images, and signs of it appeared in the thirteenth century. At first, the change was almost imperceptible, and its importance lay, not so much in its immediate effects, as in the revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> Even as late as the eleventh century, Desiderius procured some craftsmen from Constantinople to work at Monte Cassino, while he was Abbot there; and such men are known to have worked in Venice at an even later date than this.

re-orientation of Christian art which these first effects betokened. For the first time in a thousand years, Christian iconographers, who, ever since the fourth century, had been purging their symbolism of Greek naturalism and humanism, began to introduce just these elements into Christian art again. The beginnings of this process can be seen in the paintings of the Florentine, 'Cimabue', who worked in the latter half of the thirteenth century, and even more noticeably in those of the Sienese painter, Duccio di Buoninsegna, who died seventeen years after 'Cimabue' in A.D. 1319. Both these men were steeped in the Byzantine tradition, and to a casual observer there is nothing particularly new about, for instance, either *The Madonna and Child Enthroned* by 'Cimabue' or Duccio's *Madonna Rucellai*, both of which are in the Uffizi in Florence. But, in fact, these men evinced a new interest in natural appearance for its own sake: in the way a drapery lies in folds upon a head, in the expression of a face, in the construction of a hand, in the tonal relationship between a sky — even if it is still of gold leaf — and the landscape; and this interest was exotic to the Byzantine tradition. Byzantine artists had been interested in these things as symbols; for example, a Byzantine Christ-child's head, domed and enlarged, had been treated as an outward image of the indwelling *logos*, and it had been of no consequence to the artist that a human baby could never, historically or anatomically, have had such a head. Indeed, so much the better, for thus people had been unable to overlook the symbolic significance of the work.<sup>1</sup> But to 'Cimabue' and Duccio such physical considerations mattered, even if their new interest in the human form for its own sake modified only slightly the traditions which they had inherited, and in which they worked. Even so, 'Cimabue' was capable of painting the celebrated 'portrait' of St Francis as part of the *Madonna col Figlio* in the Basilica at Assisi. In its naturalism, this painting has almost nothing to do with the Byzantine

<sup>1</sup> See an excellent comment by André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, p. 295 (Secker & Warburg, London, 1954).

tradition. In their way, Duccio's paintings on the *predella* of the *Maesta* in the Museo dell'Opera in Siena are almost as far from the Byzantine *ethos* as the *Francis* of 'Cimabue'. The works of these men look thoroughly Byzantine and 'primitive' to some twentieth-century observers, it is true; but, if they be compared with the paintings which were being produced at this time in Kiev, Vladimir, and Novgorod, where the Byzantine tradition still continued unchanged, the new naturalism of the Italian works will be seen at once.

Sometimes, it seems to be assumed that the Renaissance was an exclusively Italian phenomenon which only subsequently spread to the rest of Europe from its birth-place in the hills of Tuscany and its cradle among the lagoons of Venice. It is true that the character of post-Renaissance art in Europe was largely determined by the artists of Northern Italy, but the humanizing of the images, which was begun at this time, was the result of a change of focus in man's attention away from the transcendent towards the human; and this was not confined to Italy. All over Europe, men were beginning to regard the material world with more interest than they had shown in it for a thousand years. Throughout the Gothic North, the stone-carvers and the makers of misericords and pew-ends were becoming more and more fascinated by the world around them. The mysterious solemnity and majesty of the twelfth century *Portail Royal* at Chartres had given way to something very like Christian humanism by the time that the porches on the North and South transepts of the Cathedral were built in the thirteenth century;<sup>1</sup> and the same spirit was transforming the decoration of churches and cathedrals all over Europe. A hundred years later, in about A.D. 1352, the Romanesque figure of Christ in a *vesica piscis*, which had looked down from the West front of Lincoln Minster ever

<sup>1</sup> Helen Waddell, in a singularly revealing comment, refers to the "unbroken succession of humanists and Platonists whose memory still makes Chartres a holy place". *The Wandering Scholars*, p. 88 (Constable, London, 7th ed., 1934).

since Remigius had put it there, was removed by a man named Welbourn who was Treasurer of the Cathedral at the time. In its place, there was set up a row of English kings which can be seen there to-day.<sup>1</sup> This may be an extravagant symptom of the flight from theology which was gathering momentum at this time, and probably it would be unwise to draw too many speculative conclusions from it; but, nevertheless, it was symptomatic of the times. For it was not in the fine arts alone that the new outlook was showing itself; in the applied arts of embroidery and tapestry, too, in France, Flanders, and Germany during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the subject matter, more often than not, was concerned with the affairs of this world. In the eleventh century, the Bayeux tapestry had set a secular example which was eagerly followed and developed.

However, when all this has been said, it was in Italy that the re-orientation of man's attention away from the celestial and towards the terrestrial world was most thoroughly expressed in the iconography of the Church; for, after the first tentative beginning by such men as 'Cimabue' and Duccio, there came a spectacular period during which Christian art was radically and completely transformed. In the Byzantine period, Christian iconography had, slowly but surely, climbed away from the alluring world of the senses, soaring ever higher into a region of theological symbolism and, through its images, carrying man's imagination to the transcendent realm where the images hovered between God and man. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian art hung there: magnificent, theocentric, remote but never divorced from the world of sense. It was at this time that the great Romanesque and early Gothic cathedrals were raised in a glory of grey stone and hieratic carving; the glass was fired for the windows of Chartres and Canterbury; the walls of village churches, like those at

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Cook, *Portrait of Lincoln Cathedral*, p. 52 (Phoenix House, London, 1950).

Tavant on the Loire, Berzé-la-Ville in Burgundy, and St Savin in Aquitaine, were painted; the mosaics of glass and gold were put together on the roof of the Baptistery and over the apse of San Miniato al Monte in Florence; and the Angel Choir at Lincoln was set up in symmetrical congruity over the severed head and body of Hugh of Avalon. But the art of Christendom did not stay where it was. Perhaps, indeed, it could not do so. Instead, as there comes a moment when a hovering hawk slides to one side in the gentlest of dips towards the earth, so, at the time of 'Cimabue' and Duccio, the art of the thirteenth century fluttered a little, before it dived to earth. During this dazzling descent from the Byzantine clouds, Giotto followed 'Cimabue' and Duccio; and in the train of Giotto came a constellation of others. At this time, the cities of Northern Italy were as thickly starred with painters of genius as a spring bank is congested with flowers: Orcagna, Jacopo di Cione, Bernardo Daddi, Lorenzo Monaco, Fra Angelico, Massaccio in Florence; Simone Martini, the Lorenzetti brothers, Sassetta, Matteo di Giovanni, Piero della Francesca, and the Bellini elsewhere.

In less than two centuries, these men and many others like them transformed Christian iconography. They found it a system of theological symbolism; they left it a system of general symbolism, well-adapted to the expression of a humanist *ethos* and eminently capable of embodying the reverence of the Church for the humanity of her Lord, but no longer able to evoke the mystery or the majesty of his divinity. In other words, they inherited a language of Christian theology, and they translated it into the language of Christian humanism. Giotto, the greatest of them, lived at a time during the translation of Christian iconography when it was as nearly possible as it ever was to talk in both languages and, to mix the metaphor, to make the best of both worlds. In the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, in his *Last Judgement*, he still relied upon the traditional Byzantine means of expression. Heaven is above, Christ between, the

earth and Hell below. The eye is drawn to Christ, where he sits enthroned as Judge, by his position in the design, by his greater size, by his distinctive nimbus, and by the *vesica* in which he is placed. But in the much more naturalistic scenes from the life of Christ which he painted in the same Chapel, Giotto resorted to different means of distinguishing the figure of Christ from those of others. Since he could not represent him as different in kind without destroying the prevailing naturalism of these works, he was forced to represent him as being different in degree: that is to say, he had to make him look different *as a man*. To do this, he gave him an abundance of well-combed, wavy hair; a finer and straighter nose than is natural; a perfect beard; and a nobility of brow and candour of eye which are denied to men *in imitatione Adami*. In other words, Christ was shown to be Christ by virtue of his human perfection rather than by evocation of his divinity; and thus that characteristic feature was introduced into the iconography of Christ which was to be the seed of its future development and eventual decay.

By Botticelli's time, the humanizing of the images was more thorough. Halos were reduced to vestigial rings which could scarcely be seen; Mary was represented as a pretty girl, no longer as the *Theotokos*, and the Christ-child as a chubby human babe; John the Baptist appears in one of Botticelli's canvases as an elegantly half-starved young man whom no one in their senses could possibly have mistaken for Elijah; and the Nativity appears in another, looking like a leafy spring festival in Arcadia. As a painter, Botticelli was just as much at home — indeed, by temperament far more at home — in the world of Greek mythology than he was in the realm of *Heilsgeschichte*, and without the help of a printed title it would often be difficult to guess whether a photograph of a female head from one of his paintings was meant to portray the Virgin or Venus.

By Raphael's day, the process had gone even further. His picture of *The Crucifixion* in the National Gallery in

London is so thoroughly humanist that the dark and divine mystery of Calvary has been transformed into a beautiful, balanced, be-ribboned, and harmonious incident in an ideal Italian landscape. It is superb as a work of art, but it is poor theology; for it is no longer so much a symbol of a transcendent saving event as a reconstruction of a beautiful incident in secular history. Thus an internal contradiction was introduced into Christian iconography, for in so far as the Crucifixion was an incident in secular history, precisely to that extent it certainly was not beautiful. Beauty can be attributed to it only in so far as it was something more than a judicial murder on a hill near Jerusalem. But by this time painters were so firmly set on the pictorial road of historical reconstruction that there was no turning back; and, eventually, it led to the production of such things as Rubens' picture of the dead Christ in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. This, too, is a great painting; but the painter was no longer concerned to paint the dead Christ. Instead, he painted a model posing as the dead Christ. In much the same way, Rubens' *Holy Family* in the Pinacoteca in Turin has nothing holy about it except its title. The Virgin bears a marked resemblance to the painter's second wife, Hélène Fourment; Joseph is indistinguishable from one of Rubens' satyrs, save that he grows no horns; and the child is very much a plump little creature of flesh and blood. In fact, by this time, Christian art had become a matter of painting portraits of one's friends posing in scenes of historical mime. If a painter wished to make a picture of the Nativity, he painted a *tableau vivant* in a Christmas fête; and, in so far as his picture symbolized anything, it was a symbol of the painter's delight in human things: beautiful women, naked babies, and romantic landscape. Though, needless to say, there was a minority of genuinely Christian artists throughout this humanist period, as there was a minority Church in a humanist society.

In these ways, the humanism which spread throughout Christendom during and after the Renaissance, by riveting

man's attention to man and his material environment, also riveted the painters' attention to natural appearance. Once illusionary naturalism had been introduced into Christian iconography, and especially when it had been developed to the point which it had reached in Rubens' day, certain consequences followed. It became very easy to mistake the material components of the pictorial symbols — the images — for realities in their own right, because they had become so 'natural', and they looked so 'real', that their purpose seemed to be descriptive and not evocative. A Byzantine mosaic of *Christus Pantocrator* is so unlike the natural phenomena of the every-day world that it would be almost impossible to mistake it for anything but an evocative image of a transcendent reality, to which it points, but which it never describes or contains. But a painting of Christ coming on clouds of glory to judge the world, if it be by a high Renaissance or a baroque master, is a very different thing altogether. It is no longer alien to the material world. On the contrary, its imagery is amazingly reminiscent of natural reality, and so it can easily persuade the observer to believe that the second coming will be an event similar in kind to that portrayed in the picture. Indeed, such paintings seem to have persuaded generations of Christians to believe that the second coming will be a material event in time, indefinitely postponed, involving the air-borne appearance of a half-clad athlete on a miraculously solid cloud. Such a material event, however, is too remote to be *real* in any existential sense. Always, it must be the irruption of the transcendent God *now* that is real; not the hypothetical and eventual possibility of a future material event. In Byzantine times, the symbolic representations of Christ confronted people with the power of a present, living, and yet transcendent reality. One may deplore the outbreaks of chiliastic panic which occurred; but they are proof, at least, that the idea of the *parousia* remained real. Later, this doctrine was tamed, and eventually killed, by its humanist transformation.

In fully developed humanist art, Christian iconography had been transformed into the agent of an iconolatry of a much more deadly and subtle kind than had ever existed in Byzantine days, when a few superstitious peasants may have paid ingenuous reverence to a holy image from time to time. For, in this latter-day iconolatry, the imagery of the images was taken as being descriptive of literal reality, and thus became the potential basis for a conception of religious truth as being, essentially and almost exclusively, material and temporal. So the transcendent was reduced to material terms. People may not have worshipped the actual pictures; but the God whom they worshipped was made in the image of the pictures, and this just at the time when the pictures were no longer made in the image of God but of man. So Christendom "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man". Moreover, once the events of *Heilsgeschichte*, upon which the faith of the Church rests, were presented as actually being similar in kind to the speculative reconstructions of secular history, which the artists painted, faith in them was made more difficult; for, as secular historical events, they were irrelevant to the observers' existence. Similarly, belief in them remained an easy matter only to the incurious or the unintelligent, because someone was bound eventually to notice that they were historically incredible. For, if anything in the gospels is historically certain, it is that the incarnation was obscure. The gospel story consistently testifies to the fact that men found it supremely difficult to believe that God was in Jesus. In fact, they found it so difficult that, according to the gospels, they crucified him for blasphemy. And yet the painters, deprived by their preoccupation with illusionary naturalism and idealist humanism of symbolic means of portraying Jesus as Christ, increasingly drew attention to his divinity by presenting him as self-evidently the Christ in virtue of some extraordinary human feature: his great beauty, remarkable muscularity, commanding presence, or other unique physical perfection. So the Christ of the

humanized images was both incompatible with the Jesus of history and incapable of evoking the idea of the Christ of faith. In fact, he was a false image — an *εἰδωλον* — and Christian iconography had become the instrument of idolatry.

Needless to say, this does not mean that European art was no longer great at this time. On the contrary, it was magnificent. It simply means that it was no longer Christian. To those who, without any special competence in the arts, have been brought up to assume that the works of the high Renaissance and baroque masters are the highlights of religious art, this will seem a strange assertion; and most of us have, in fact, been brought up in such a way that we do not question this implicit belief. Our nurseries and 'Child's Bibles' were furnished with illustrations which had their anaemic roots in the art of this time. The pictures, decorations, and furniture of our churches, when they are not Gothic, are made in the manner of post-Renaissance art. Even the film makers of the twentieth century, when they concern themselves with biblical times, dress and *coiffe* those who purport to represent Christ and the disciples in a manner based on the pictures of this period; and it is small wonder that many people assume that this is the one and only art form suitable to Christian subjects. Such an assumption, however, would be regarded as false by most artists and art historians.

The fact is that the art of this period was not made primarily to the glory of God but to the glory of man; and this was decisive for its nature. It was magnificent; but it was primarily humanist, not Christian. It is important to understand that a work of art, so long as it is a work of art and not *pastiche*, is always made to the glory of something; or, to put this another way, a true symbol always draws attention to a transcendent idea. With a few exceptions, however, European painters no longer worked to the specific glory of God, whatever titles they may have given to their pictures, and even when they painted them expressly to

adorn churches. Instead, they painted to the glory of other things. In Italy, the city states were glorified by such men as Titian and Veronese; in the Low Countries, Frans Hals, de Hooch, and Vermeer glorified various aspects of Dutch life: its citizens, its domesticity, its simplicity; while, at a later date in England, Lely, Reynolds, and Romney painted to the glory of the English gentry. But underlying all these differing, local aims there lay the constant assumption, explicit or implicit, that the arts should glorify humanity. There was a great renaissance of the Greek passion for the nude, whereas for a thousand years, when people had been portrayed without their clothing, they had been painted, as Sir Kenneth Clark has put it, not nude but naked.<sup>1</sup> Concurrently, there arose an interest in landscape for its own sake, and the material world was idealized and glorified. Since it was fitting that the nobility of man should be enshrined in the splendour of Nature (with a capital N), the landscape painters set themselves to do on canvas what Capability Brown was later to do on the ground. Inevitably, if slowly, fidelity to the appearance of the material world became, not only the painter's main concern, but his only aim. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the Pre-Raphaelites, on the one hand, and the Impressionists, on the other, driven by an almost religious single-mindedness of purpose and a passionate purity of intention, pledged themselves to natural appearance for its own sake, and illusion reigned supreme. In a world in which Nature was sublime; where the proper study of mankind was Man; and where, too, Man was considered to be so completely master of his own destiny that progress was held to be both inevitable and beneficent, anything less than complete fidelity to the terrestrial paradise, in which this demi-god, Man, lived, was looked upon as little better than blasphemous.

The final result of this process of humanizing the images, to which European art was subjected, was to kill it; or, to be more precise, to render unusable the particular

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (John Murray, London, 1956).

system of pictorial symbolism which had been used in Europe for centuries; for the twentieth century has been marked by the universal rejection of the traditional means of expression in all the arts. Artists can no longer use these means, because they no longer mean anything. They are dead. It is of the greatest importance to understand why and how this happened: why naturalism proved lethal, and how it killed the system of symbolism which it attacked.

The traditional European school of art was not the only system to fall victim to naturalism. Greek art was its first victim. In the archaic period, until about 600 B.C. the art of Greece was 'primitive', symbolic, unnaturalistic. Signs of a new characteristic — a humanizing of the images — appeared in the following century, and, at first, the new naturalism promoted a burst of unexampled growth. But the Golden Age was short-lived, and while good things were produced after it, in general it soon gave way to the decadence of Hellenistic art and the insensitive naturalism of Roman *pastiche*. Judging by the fates of Greek and European art, this is the usual course of events. The first and most obvious effect of naturalism is that normal growth is replaced by a sudden and unprecedented inflorescence of great vigour and splendour which more or less quickly runs to seed. As the discipline of the original symbolic formalism is gradually destroyed by the invasion of naturalism, its forms become more and more uncontrolled, and over-emphasis, over-statement, and plastic rodomontade replace both the reticence and the power of the former symbolism. One might say that, in this stage, naturalist art protests too much. But this over-demonstrative frenzy soon spends itself, and gives way to sheer dullness. In the case of Greek art, the last stage before death was marked by the vapid, perfunctory, and insignificant academism of much of the statuary of the Hellenistic period and by the slipshod, romantic interior decoration of much Roman wall painting. In the case of European art, the last stage produced the momentary descriptive charm of a Monet, the meticulous and meaningless

natural history of a Holman Hunt, and the sterile and eclectic bravura of a Sargent.

Why, then, does naturalism kill? There are two stages in the murder of the host body; for, before the system under attack is actually destroyed, it is disintegrated. Thus, the destruction of its unity is the first stage in the murder. It is easy to see why this should happen. Naturalism, being the expression of a humanist concentration upon man, necessarily reflects the social and ideological consequences of such a re-orientation of the attention. But men in various social groups tend to idealize, not the idea of perfect man in general, but their own particular idea of perfect man. Their own particular idea of perfect man invariably bears a marked resemblance to themselves; and this, too, the artists reflect. So an originally international — or, at any rate, non-national and homogeneous — school of art, when it is attacked by humanism, tends to disintegrate into a collection of national schools, reflecting national ideas and characteristics much more strongly than before. The main similarity between these national schools is a common naturalism. The more humanist a society becomes, the more its pictorial art reflects the idiosyncratic social *ethos* of the group, and the further it diverges from the art of other social groups. Moreover, in a humanist society, those individuals who successfully glorify their neighbours attract to themselves the admiration and adulation of the members of the society whom they have so pleasingly flattered. Some, at least, of the glory with which they have invested their fellows is returned to them. So painters, instead of being treated as anonymous servants of God or the gods, are elevated to the rank of 'Great Masters', and a further cause of disintegration is added to those which are already hastening the disappearance of the unity of the school. At this stage, humanism, which has already broken up the original school into a number of national schools, further breaks up these latter into a number of individual schools: the 'school of Leonardo' the 'school of Rubens', the 'East Anglian school',

the 'Impressionists', and the like. Eventually, a position is reached where individual masters work in such different styles that they no longer form a school at all, except in name. So, in the end, humanism leads to anarchical individualism.

But the second stage in the murder, leading to the final demise of a particular system of symbolism, is the result of another feature of humanist naturalism. As has been said already, the difference between a living work of art and *pastiche* is that, where the former is a symbol of a transcendent idea, the latter is a slavish imitation of a material object. If, then, a symbol can only live so long as it continues to symbolize, similarly, a system of symbolism must die when it can no longer draw men's attention to ideas. Since the dynamic of humanism is such as increasingly to draw attention to man, while it may begin by fixing the artists' attention to the *idea* of man, it will end by fixing it to the *fact* of man as he is. Thus, from the glorification of various aspects of the idea of man — man as a saint, as a prince, as a god-like nude, as a landed gentleman, as an honest Dutch *bourgeois*, and so on — humanist art devolves into the representation of man as a material object. At this stage humanist art is only different in degree from *pastiche*, but not in kind. For, if a symbol cannot symbolize — indeed, is not a symbol — in the absence of a transcendent component, the slavish imitation of man as a material object is no better, artistically or symbolically, than the slavish imitation of a picture. In just this way, invasive humanism with its concomitant naturalism, not only destroyed Christian iconography, but also destroyed, eventually, the humanist art which it had been instrumental in creating.

It is hardly necessary here to labour to establish the fact that, during this whole period, the gradual and progressive flight of the artists from theology to humanism, and thence to anthropology, as it has been briefly described, was, in fact, a faithful reflection of the transformation of Western Europe from a theocentric into an anthropocentric society;

for it is self-evident that the society which began by valuing man in virtue of his status as a member of the redeemed community of Christ's Church, and which, with its back to the terrestrial world, turned to the Church for guidance and inspiration, has been slowly transformed by humanism into the society of our own day which values man for himself and in himself. But it is relevant to this inquiry to take note of the fact that this transformation was accompanied by an ever increasing interest in the material side of theological symbolism, very like the humanizing of the images in the arts. In fact, from the theological point of view, one of the first signs of nascent humanism was the almost imperceptibly greater degree of attention which began to be paid at the time, and in the works, of such theologians as St Bernard of Clairvaux to the humanity of Christ. Simultaneously, as if to emphasize the importance of Christ's human nature, greater interest began to be shown in her from whom he took it. The movement of Mary in towards the centre of the Christian picture, and the proliferation of devotions to her, were amongst the first and surest symptoms of emergent humanism.

At about the same time, there occurred a similar and also, at first, almost imperceptible change of emphasis in attitude to the eucharistic sacrament. The emergence of this new attitude can be seen very clearly in the history of the practice of reservation. From the earliest times, the remains at the eucharist had been reserved for various uses. For instance, in A.D. 585 the Council of Mâcon had authorized its placing in the sacristy so that children might come and consume it on Wednesdays and Fridays.<sup>1</sup> But "as more attention came to be bestowed upon the 'matter' of the sacrament there was a tendency to regard the sacristy no longer as a suitable place for reservation. A locker or cupboard was constructed in the walls or pillars of the sanctuary, or in the reredos behind the altar. It was in such a place, it would seem, that

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Freestone, *The Sacrament Reserved*, p. 189, Alcuin Club Collections, xxi, 1917.

the Eucharist was kept in some French churches in the twelfth century. Among the canons and injunctions issued (about the year 1198) by Eudes de Sully, Bishop of Paris, is one that bids reverence be paid to the altars, and particularly to that whereat the Host is reserved or mass is being said."<sup>1</sup> But although it was "in the eleventh century that the rudiments of a cultus definitely paid to the reserved sacrament"<sup>2</sup> first appeared, there was at this time still "no trace of any custom in which the presence of Christ was secured in the church out of Mass-time for purposes of devotion".<sup>3</sup> Even so, it was during this same century, in A.D. 1059 in Rome, that Berengar was induced to sign a statement that he believed "that the bread and wine placed on the altar are after consecration not only a sacrament but also the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and that these are sensibly handled and broken by the hands of the priests and crushed by the teeth of the faithful, not only sacramentally but in reality".<sup>4</sup> Shortly after this, in A.D. 1079, the doctrine of Transubstantiation was officially adopted as an article of faith, and in the following century the new feast of *Corpus Christi* received the authoritative blessing of the Church. Thus, it was at this time that the way was opened for the explicit enthronement of the material elements of the faith, which was soon to follow with all its attendant paraphernalia: devotions to the Virgin, monstrances, sacred hearts, and the sentimental humanism of most later 'religious' statuary and painting.

When it came, the Protestant reaction against this materialization of the Church's faith was unable entirely to escape from the very thing against which it was protesting, so strongly was the tide of humanist materialism running. For, if the Protestant world took drastic measures to ensure that such things as the sacraments should not be idolized, and if it gave orders "that such feigned images as you know in any of your cures to be so abused with pilgrimages

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> H. Bettenson, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

or offerings of anything made thereunto, you shall for avoiding that most detestable offence of idolatry forthwith take down,"<sup>1</sup> in their place it set up a Bible. Protestant orthodoxy did not idolize the Bible any more than Tridentine orthodoxy idolized the sacrament, but popular Protestantism fell into something which was almost indistinguishable from bibliolatry. Even so considerable a man as Matthew Henry could enunciate in the Preface to his Commentary, as one of the six principles which had guided him in its compilation, "that divine revelation is not now to be found or expected anywhere but in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament". Of the biblical authors, he expressed the opinion that "the blessed Spirit did not only habitually prepare and qualify the penmen of Scripture for that service, and put it into their hearts to write, but did likewise assist their understandings and memories in recording those things which they themselves had the knowledge of, and effectually secure them from error and mistake; and what they could not know by revelation . . . the same blessed Spirit gave them clear and satisfactory information of. And, no doubt, as far as was necessary to the end designed, they were directed by the Spirit even in language and expression." So he could conclude that the Bible "is a work that fathers itself".<sup>2</sup>

So, while that part of the disintegrated Western Church which remained in communion with Rome, in practice if not in strict Tridentine theory, located God's presence in the matter of the sacrament and his authority in the material Church and its human head, there was a tendency amongst the reformed bodies to confine the Holy Spirit to a book. It was only a step from these respective positions to the doctrinal materialism of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, in 1854 there was formulated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as an article of faith, and it was

<sup>1</sup> H. Bettenson, *op. cit.*, p. 327. Quoted from *The Royal Injunctions*, 1538.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, Vol. i, Preface, 1706.

followed by that of Papal Infallibility in 1870. On the other hand, the astonishing rumpus over Darwinianism revealed the extent to which the value of the Bible was regarded as being dependent upon its accuracy as a repository of material, geological, pre-historical, and anthropological fact; while, a little later, the popularity of the search for the 'Jesus of history' bore witness to the same materialist predilection. It is the materialism of the underlying assumptions upon which this kind of nineteenth century theology rested that is significant; for the basic assumption of fundamentalism was — and is, of course — that, since that which is not materially true cannot be true in any sense, all things recorded in Holy Scripture must be looked upon as being materially true, if they are to be believed. Similarly, though with very different results, the basic assumption of the liberal 'Jesus of history' school of thought, as epitomized in the work of Harnack, was that, since material reality as we know it is the only reality, certain events recorded in the Bible, which do not abide by the normal rules governing material reality, cannot be believed at all. Thus, on the one hand, there was an insistence upon the literal accuracy of the Bible, arising from an *a priori* materialist prejudice; while, on the other, there was a rejection of much of the scriptures as a result of precisely the same *a priori* materialism. So the concentration upon the human and material components of the theological images, together with their enthronement, led, in the end, to a result very similar to that which came of humanizing the artistic images: the transcendent truths, to which the images should have pointed, were obscured.

The full measure of this disaster can be appreciated only if it be remembered that, as a result of it, most Europeans became, neither Papists, nor fundamentalists, nor yet liberal Protestants, but secular materialists. As the first stage in the destruction of European art by the invading virus of humanism had been its disintegration, so, when the Church was attacked by the same disease, it, too, was first split

up into a number of impoverished parts, each with a noticeably regional or national character of its own. Subsequently, within these disunited fragments of the Church, the process of materializing and humanizing the theological images was continued and accelerated, until the last and fatal stage was reached, for theology as for the arts, in the nineteenth century. Since then, for most Western Europeans belief in the materialized, humanized system of theological symbolism — infallible Church, transubstantiated sacrament, fundamentalist Bible — has proved to be impossible, simply because its material images have been presented for so long as self-sufficient facts in their own right that people can no longer be led by them to see the transcendent truths which they, the material images, were created to embody and express. It would, perhaps, be an exaggeration to say that people have rejected the language of theological symbolism because they have been taught, for so long, to pat the word, dog, that the word, itself, no longer signifies to them a four-footed animal; but it would not be far from the truth. For many people to-day, theological symbolism is a dead language: that is to say, a set of words which do not connote any reality beyond themselves.

## ICONOCLASM<sup>1</sup>

THE trouble with idols is that, eventually, someone is bound to discover that "they have mouths, and speak not: eyes have they, and see not". In the pictorial arts, the process of humanizing the images reached its conclusion, and finally destroyed their ability to say anything, in the late nineteenth century when they came to be treated, no longer as means of communication, but as means of description. Having, if not mouths, the material means of communication, the arts no longer said anything. In vain, artists tried to say something by resorting to literary means of communication in paint; and "every picture tells a story" became the watchword of the Academies. But the arts were dead, and nothing could bring the corpse to life again. This the early twentieth century discovered. As a result, there has followed a period of wholesale and salutary iconoclasm. Humanist art, the idol of humanist society, has been cast down, and its characteristic search for verisimilitude as the be-all and end-all of an artist's task has been abandoned. In its place, 'modern' art has arisen, and its nature, object, and methods should be of considerable interest to theologians; for modern art, too, is concerned to solve the problem of the communication of transcendent ideas in our materialist society. The fact that it still arouses considerable hostility even after more than half a century of vigorous life, while it may deter others from studying it, should at least arouse the lively sympathy of the Church which knows by experience how difficult it is to talk to a materialist world of transcendent ideas.

<sup>1</sup> The word, iconoclasm, is used here in the general sense of rebellion against a system of imagery, and not in the particular sense attaching to the iconoclastic movement and controversy in Byzantine times.

What are the artists of the twentieth century trying to do? They are trying to do what artists, if they are to be artists and not *pasticheurs*, must do in all periods of history: namely, to embody and express in their work the leading ideas of their age. But, since they are living in a post-iconoclastic period, they have not inherited a living tradition in which to work; and so they have been forced to look elsewhere than in the immediate past for their means of expression. However, since all new movements in the arts must have their roots in the past, because the immediate past is blocked with the debris of a fallen idol, modern artists have been forced to go behind and around it in search of other styles, first to adopt and, subsequently, to adapt to their own purposes. As usual, they have used whatever has been available to them; but the ubiquity of museums, the ease of travel, and the many excellent means of reproducing works of art have made available to them all the world's styles. So, whereas after the collapse of Greek naturalism, the syncretism of the day involved only a few local Mediterranean styles, modern syncretism is a melting pot of world-wide and pan-historical proportions. Japanese coloured prints, negro sculpture, bronze age idols from the Cyclades, pottery from Peru, Melanesian masks, T'ang horses, rock paintings from the Sahara, decorated swords from the steppes of Mongolia, icons from Constantinople: all have been thrown into the twentieth century pot. So it is small wonder that the modern art, which is brewed there, is diverse and bewildering in its manifestations.

But it is not only in the diversity of its adopted, and as yet only partly adapted, styles that there is cause for bewilderment; for the art of to-day is a faithful expression of the *ethos* of to-day, which is precisely one of confusion, fear, and uncertainty. The shallow rational certainty of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been dissolved in the irrational heat of the twentieth with its social revolution, war, racial hatred, and technological stampede. Even the image of man, which, at the end of the nineteenth century, seemed so

firmly seated on its throne, has disintegrated before the eyes of the twentieth, so that man no longer knows who he is or where he is going. Meanwhile, the vacuum of belief created by the supercilious assurance and self-satisfied materialism of the Enlightenment has been filled with a host of ill-assorted leading ideas, some of which are very new, while some are very old. Dialectical materialism rubs shoulders with the revived astrology of the popular press; the Old Testament lion of *apartheid* lies down with the lamb of sentimental humanism; the banner of human rights and freedoms waves bravely over the heads of a population, not of men and women, but of 'hands', 'operatives', and 'displaced persons', who are treated as units in social groups, income brackets, and intelligence streams; logical positivists, Christians, and Communists teach in the same Universities; and while those who suffer from neurosis vie for statistical supremacy with the people who indulge in suicide or divorce, babies are given both more plentiful and better balanced supplies of milk, orange juice, and cod liver oil at cut prices. Since all these factors help to condition and create the contemporary *ethos* which the arts must somehow express, it is hardly surprising that the artists, whose job it is to epitomize and externalize in their work the leading ideas of this bewildering and bewildered world, should produce work which is intrinsically bewildering too. Indeed, if they did not do so, they would be failing dismally as artists.

Diverse and difficult to understand as much modern art may be, there is one characteristic which is common to all its manifestations: a return to symbolic means of communication. Verisimilitude and illusionary naturalism have been almost universally rejected. The significance of this revolution lies in what it portends for the future, not just of the arts, but of European society. For, as the first signs of humanism which appeared in the works of such men as 'Cimabue' and Duccio were portentous of a radical re-orientation of European society, so the modern rejection of

verisimilitude is significant of more than an artistic revolution. In the thirteenth century, when 'Cimabue' and Duccio, like sensitive barometers, gave notice of a coming change in the European weather, the social climate of the day was far from humanist; but the prophetic indications which they gave at that time proved to be extremely reliable. There is no reason to suppose that the arts are any less reliable, prophetically, to-day than they were seven hundred years ago. The ideological barometer in the late nineteenth century, when such men as Cézanne and Seurat hoisted their storm signals, seemed set fair for materialist humanism; but the first half of the twentieth century has been full of straws in the wind which they predicted, and humanism, if not materialism, has already been badly damaged by the rising gale.

If the indications given by the artists of to-day are to be trusted, materialism is no more likely to survive, in the long run, than humanism. For Picasso has followed Cézanne, and Picasso's work represents an even more radical rejection of the material world than that of the Byzantine artists, even if it is a rejection of a very different kind. It represents a rejection which is the result of so profound a disillusionment with materialism that it has given way to an ontological agnosticism which regards the world as being, not only a much less easy phenomenon to understand than it appeared to be in Thomas Huxley's day, but also probably a purposeless thing, which it is impossible to understand however deeply it may be analysed. Significantly, too, Picasso's world is an impersonal world in which man is of no more significance than any other physical object; for the anguished dissolution of the human image takes a place of no greater importance in Picasso's work than that given to the unintelligent and raucous self-assertion of a cock or to the destructive brute force of a bull. Meanwhile, the ordinary things of life — kitchen tables, musical instruments, newspapers, women, radiators, fish — are broken down into the lovely, if derisory and terrifying, constituents of an amoral

and purposeless mechanistic process of flux, law, and force. In fact, Picasso's world has this in common with the world of religion, animism, and fetichism, that it is a world in which the known quantities of normal material reality are no longer dominant: a world in thrall to mysterious, irrational, inimical, and destructive powers. Indeed, it is a world in which no useful purpose can be served by "contending . . . against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places," let alone against flesh and blood, simply because it is a world in which the idea of 'purpose', useful or otherwise, has been rendered meaningless by scepticism and destructive doubt.

If Picasso bestrides the narrow world of the pictorial arts like a Colossus, overshadowing most of his contemporaries, there are more mundane signs of the reaction against humanist naturalism. The most unlikely people are deserting verisimilitude. Even the academicians and the *pasticheurs* are now copying the methods of the symbol-makers in spite of the fact that, for more than half a century, academism has consistently misunderstood and vilified modern art, while confidently predicting its imminent demise. Even more significant, however, than the belated and partial change of heart on the part of the academicians has been the enthusiastic adoption of crude but forceful symbolic means of communication by the advertising world. According to statistics, it pays to advertise, and enormous sums of money are invested in advertisement. Since the pictorial method adopted is unnaturalistic as often as it is the reverse, those who pay for these advertisements must believe symbolic methods to be successful in communicating ideas to the public, or they would not resort to them. Admittedly, advertisement is not usually concerned with the communication of profound, complex, or original ideas; but, even so, the fact that it relies upon symbols is significant. For such methods are possible only as a result of the revolution in the arts which began in the late nineteenth century, and they

are proof that the effects of this revolution have spread throughout European society.

The problem confronting artists to-day is not identical with that which confronts theologians. The artists are faced with the task of forging pictorial and plastic means of embodying and expressing the leading ideas of the twentieth century in their work, while the theologians are concerned only to inject into the new *ethos* the leading ideas of the Christian faith. But even if their tasks be different, both artists and theologians have inherited from the past traditional means of symbolic communication which are inadequate to their respective tasks to-day; and consequently both have been forced to think again about the very roots of the problem of communication. As far as the arts are concerned, there has been a universal and explosive re-affirmation of the necessity and validity of symbolism over against naturalism and verisimilitude. As far as Christian evangelism and communication are concerned, however, there has been no such widespread recognition of the necessity to put the traditional language in order. Instead, there seems to be an increasing tendency in practice, if not in theological theory, to resort to biblical fundamentalism, on the one hand, or to sacramental materialism, on the other, as the best means of fighting contemporary unbelief. But, since the modern inability to understand theological symbolism for what it is arose, in the first place, from a misplaced concentration upon the material components of the symbols to the exclusion of their transcendent components, contemporary unbelief at one extreme, and a fundamentalist or sacramentalist insistence upon the reality of the material components at the other extreme, both stem from the mistaken obsession of the materialist with the material.

Indeed, this may explain the apparent success of those kinds of evangelism which proclaim, respectively, a fundamentalist gospel and a factually divine Church; for it is easier to persuade a materialist world to accept something which is preached as a material and factual reality, than it is

to persuade it to change its whole mental habit and accept as true something preached as a transcendent reality revealed only in and through a material image. But the success of the former kind of evangelism is not necessarily a successful preaching of the gospel. On the contrary, it can be a successful dissemination of a materialist misunderstanding of it. At best, it can provide a stepping-stone to real understanding of the gospel. At worst, it can constitute a sort of 'inoculation' against Christianity which, thereafter, renders a man more or less immune from belief. In either case, it seems probable that, eventually, it will defeat its own end. People sometimes believe that they are fighting influenza by not going to bed, whereas by not keeping warm and by failing to take the necessary remedial drugs, they are actually aiding and abetting the ravages of the disease in themselves and spreading it to other people. Similarly, a fundamentalist insistence upon the actuality of myth and the material reality of imagery is no way to fight the secular materialism which is such a barrier to belief to-day. Instead, it is to aid and abet the disease from which our society is suffering by injecting it with yet another dose of the virus which is infecting the body politic.

However, the practical conservatism of the Church in this respect is obviously justifiable to a certain extent; for, while the artists can afford — indeed, they cannot avoid — a radical revolution of means, simply because their task is to express the revolutionary and chaotic ideas of our time, the theologians are still concerned to impart the same gospel message as has always concerned them. Complete revolution, therefore, is impossible for theology. Moreover, much theological conservatism, which is not strictly justifiable, is very understandable. For one thing, those who advocate a radical recognition and admission of the mythical character of myth, the symbolic significance of symbol, and the distinctive difference between history and *Heilsgeschichte* are easily confused with the theological liberals of the turn of the century, despite the fact that the aims and assumptions

of the latter were entirely different from those of the demythologizers. As a result, the radical biblical critics and theologians of to-day inherit, quite unjustly but very understandably, much of the opprobrium and mistrust which early liberalism aroused. Moreover, while to the Catholic party in general demythologization is suspect as merely another manifestation of the alleged tendency of Protestants to 'water down' the faith, to uproot it from history, and to denigrate the sacraments and the Church, certain elements in the Protestant party regard any talk of symbols and symbolism as further evidence of Catholic sacerdotalism, sacramentalism, and pantheism. Unfortunately, it would be foolish to deny that both sides have some grounds for their suspicions. For instance, Fr. Vann's desire, as reported by Canon Dillistone in his book, *Christianity and Symbolism*, to "suggest ways in which some of the great archetypal symbols of mankind may be recovered" will arouse misgiving in many more minds than those of diehard Protestants, when it transpires that "the Hero-King, the Fire of Life, the Woman, the Bread and Wine—these, he believes, have an essential part to play in a rich and fully human existence".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, to encourage a re-affirmation of the validity of symbolism on the grounds that "Nature is symbolic and the power of this symbolism is the mystery of the life of Nature. The Holy Spirit came down into the world at its creation; His everlasting presence is its very life, which witnesses to Him,"<sup>2</sup> is to encourage overt pantheism, however forcefully this may be denied. On the other hand, when certain kinds of Protestant theology are presented in such a way as to "fix the narrow model of personal encounter on the whole form of our relation with our Creator,"<sup>3</sup> and moreover so as to suggest that the word of the preaching, divorced, apparently, from the person of the preacher, let alone the community of the Church, is the sum of all things needful for salvation, Catholics will not be the only people to protest.

<sup>1</sup> p. 286.      <sup>2</sup> Eugeny Lampert, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch. Article by Austin Farrer, p. 222.

In the same way, reference to God as the wholly, or the ultimately, Other would seem to be more appropriate to the God of Ezekiel than to the Father of Jesus Christ, and will not encourage the sympathy of the Catholic world.

However, even if conservatism arising from such causes as these is understandable, if the arts are a reliable guide — and they have shown themselves to be such in the past — to continue to preach myth as history and symbol as fact is a suicidal procedure. Thus, one is left with an apparent dilemma; for both extreme remedies are unacceptable. Indeed, both have been tried and found wanting. On the one hand, one may not conclude that all myth and all symbolism should be wholly excised from the preaching of the gospel; for this has already been attempted by Harnack, and reduces the gospel to secular history and material fact, interlarded with general ethical principles. On the other hand, one may not conclude that all natural fact is symbolic or sacramental; for this would be to transform Christianity into pantheism, or idealism, or both, and would be radically inconsistent with the gospel too. Since, therefore, neither of these extreme courses can be commended, the only remaining course is to re-examine the relationship of fact and symbol, history and myth, in the gospel itself in an attempt to reach a better understanding of it. For, as has been said already, until their relationship is better understood, the interpretation of the gospel is bound to remain a matter of individual whim, and there can be no generally accepted, defensible, or consistent standard of Christian truth. In the hope and belief that, after this preliminary study of the symbols used by artists and of the conditions governing their life and death, what has been said may be found applicable to theological symbolism, an attempt will be made in the remainder of this book to understand the latter better.

## THE IMAGE OF GOD

THE fundamental postulate of the gospel, upon which all else depends, is that man's position in the world has been radically changed by the action of God in and through Christ. "The old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself."<sup>1</sup>

The 'old' that has passed away is the old ineluctable condition of separation between man and God. Before Christ, man had been at enmity with God,<sup>2</sup> because sin had cut him off from God.<sup>3</sup> But the result of God's action in Christ is that this old separation has been done away, and man has been reconciled to God in a new unity through Christ, in order, in "the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things in earth".<sup>4</sup>

The nature of sin that leads to separation is a turning of man's attention to self. It results in a life of self-assertion, self-reliance, and self-regard, whereas man was created to live a life of reliance upon God in gratitude to him for the gift of life, and so in his service. A sinful life is lived, as St Paul puts it, "after the flesh", and is an attempt to find fulfilment and security apart from God in the material world and in human achievements. It manifests itself when a man believes the devil's lie, "You will not die . . . You will be like God;"<sup>5</sup> in other words, when man falsely takes to himself the attributes of God, enthroning himself in God's

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17, 18; cf. Gal. 6:15; Col. 1:19, 20. All quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 2:12; cf. Gen. 3:24; Lev. 22:3; Isa. 59:2; and *passim* throughout the O.T.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 1:10; cf. Eph. 2:17, 18; Rom. 6:5; Gal. 3:28; Jn. 10:16; 17:20.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 3:4.

place. From this, it is but a short step to a mistaken belief that he can find security by his own efforts, as when he says to himself that he has "ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry," forgetting that his security is vested in God who may have other plans for him.<sup>1</sup> More subtly, it manifests itself in an attempt to find security in human righteousness, as when the Pharisee of the parable relied, in his conversation with God, upon his belief that he was "not like other men" as a result of his religious achievement, the success of which had given him a claim upon God; or so he supposed.<sup>2</sup> But since the whole law can be summed up in the injunction to love God and your neighbour, when 'keeping' the law leads to self-assertive claims upon God for legal services rendered to him, on the one hand, and to self-satisfied pride *vis-à-vis* one's fellow men, on the other, keeping the law has led to its most thorough breach. For the purpose of the law, according to St Paul, is precisely to show man the sinfulness of self-assertive rebellion against God's claim to be man's only ground of security and source of fulfilment. Its effect, however, is to arouse a rebellious desire (*ἐπιθυμία*) to assert himself against God even more than before. This self-centred rebellion is the root of all sin, from the primary sin of idolatry<sup>3</sup> to sexual perversion, "envy, murder, strife, malignity," and the rest.<sup>4</sup> For self-assertion is a form of self-idolatry, and it leads to all the various ways of denigrating and depreciating other people in order that the self may be asserted over them and glorified in contrast with them.

But a sinful life is also self-stultifying, for it leads to anxiety<sup>5</sup> and death.<sup>6</sup> Instead of being a living process of self-fulfilment and self-realization, it is a dying process of deterioration and self-destruction with a gradual, accompanying, and progressive loss of freedom, vision, and possibility. Man becomes the captive of sin; for, once he has sinned, he no longer controls or directs his self-assertive desire, but is

<sup>1</sup> Lk. 12:16 ff.    <sup>2</sup> Lk. 18:10 ff.    <sup>3</sup> Rom. 1:22 f.    <sup>4</sup> Rom. 1:29.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 8:15; cf. 1 Cor. 7:32.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 6:23.

controlled and directed by it, thereby losing his freedom of determination and action. Moreover, since he can only assert himself at the expense of others, he is brought into conflict with people who, like himself, are seeking self-aggrandizement at their neighbours' expense. Thus, "this world", as St Paul calls the transitory sphere of human self-assertion and achievement, or simply "the world" of Johannine usage — both meaning the world in revolt from God — is "in bondage" to sin; and its pervasive atmosphere of hatred, suspicion, and fear completely conditions man's environment, development, judgement, and actions. So self-assertive rebellion against God, eventually and very completely, defeats its own ends; for it culminates, not in the fulfilment of the self, but in its destruction. Man, who was made for life and perfection, ends in death and corruption.

Jesus ran counter to this pattern of revolt, self-assertion, hatred, and death with its concomitant separation from God. The pattern of his life was obedience, reliance upon God, love, and life. So, as the primary sin of rebellion, had been committed by man, and the subsequent pattern of sin and separation from God fixed upon the world, this was reversed, and the pattern was broken, by the obedience of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The whole of the N.T. emphasizes the completeness and the crucial importance of Jesus' obedience, the key-note of which is struck in the prayer, "not my will but thine be done". In the synoptic Gospels the accounts of the Ministry begin with the temptation in the wilderness, which was a temptation to abuse his powers by turning them to his own account, making them the instruments of self-aggrandizement and worldly power. Peter, at Caesarea Philippi, is "not on the side of God but of men", when he identifies himself with this world by trying to persuade Jesus to abandon the way of obedience.<sup>2</sup> His opponents tempt him by asking for a sign, by which they mean a material manifestation of his power in and over this world.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 5:19.

<sup>2</sup> Mk. 8:32 ff; Mt. 16:22 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Mk. 8:11; Mt. 16:1. cf. Jn. 2:18.

the Johannine multitude try to make him king by force, because they want to exploit his power for material and political ends.<sup>2</sup> But Jesus defeats these temptations by obeying the will of God and not the will of men. In the fourth gospel, his complete dependence upon the will of God, without which he is prepared to do nothing, is also emphasized by the repeated statements that his "time has not yet come".<sup>3</sup> It is only when it is God's will that he should do something, or that something should happen to him, that he will act. The quality of his obedience is shown in Gethsemane; in the trial, when Pilate presents opportunity after opportunity of escape; and, later, on the Cross when he refuses to be goaded by agony or vituperation into retaliation and hatred, and when he refuses, too, to come down from the Cross by turning the power of God to his own use for his own material and worldly well-being. St Paul, too, emphasizes the perfection and completeness of his obedience by saying that he "became obedient unto death";<sup>4</sup> and so does the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* when he says that "although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered".<sup>5</sup>

All this has been well summarized by Hoskyns and Davey. "The whole record concentrates, then, neither upon a righteousness of the heart nor yet upon a righteousness of the spirit of man, but upon a spiritual righteousness of the heart passing outwards into concrete speech and action, and finally into the bloody scene of the Crucifixion. In this particular history, in this scene of flesh and blood, the creative obedience to the will of God was wrought out. The uniqueness of the obedience of Jesus in the midst of opposition and of complete misunderstanding, dictated by a creative and penetrating insight into the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures, is not an invention of the

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 6:15.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. 6:26.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* comment by R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel*, *ad. loc.* (C.U.P., 1953).

<sup>4</sup> Phil. 2:8; cf. Rom. 5:19.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. 5:8.

Theologians or of the Evangelists. This was the conscious purpose which lay behind and conditioned His words and actions . . . Thus far it might be argued that the evidence points to a strange human act of will by which Jesus determined to obey the will of God as He had extracted the knowledge of it from a persistent study of the Old Testament Scriptures, and by which He also determined to conceive of His life as a personal conflict with the Prince of Evil. It might also be argued that He supposed that the carrying out of His determination to the point of a voluntary death would be fraught with immense consequences for men and women; that He would, in fact, by an act of utter obedience, bring in the New Order, or, as it were, wrench it from the hands of God Himself. This would make the New Testament in the end anthropocentric, for it would revolve round a human act. But this is not the truth. No New Testament writer could think of Jesus as the Greeks thought of Prometheus. We must therefore conclude that Jesus Himself did not think of His life and Death as a human achievement at all. Language descriptive of human heroism is entirely foreign to the New Testament. The Event of the Life and Death of Jesus was not thought of as a human act, but as an act of God wrought out in human flesh and blood, which is a very different matter. The Event was conceived as a descending act of God, not as the ascending career of a man who was successful in the sphere of religion."<sup>1</sup>

The Greek word for obedience, *ὑπακοή*, implies listening to, hearkening to someone;<sup>2</sup> and Jesus' complete and radical obedience was the active expression of his attention to the will of God. Thus, Jesus' attention to God and his obedience were two aspects, the passive and the active, of one integral attitude: theocentricity. He did nothing on his own or of his own. This is stressed particularly in the fourth

<sup>1</sup> E. Hoskyns and N. Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, pp. 252-5 (Faber & Faber, London, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> Liddell and Scott, *ὑπακούω*, to give ear, to listen and answer, and thus of dependents to submit to.

gospel. "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works."<sup>1</sup> "I can do nothing on my own authority . . . If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true."<sup>2</sup> "I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me."<sup>3</sup> These may not be the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, but they do no more than make explicit that which is implicit in the synoptic gospels in such a saying as, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother,"<sup>4</sup> or "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the synoptic gospels, the record of the time spent by Jesus in prayer also bears witness to the constancy of his attention to God. So constant, indeed, was his attention and obedience that he was never separated from God; "I am not alone, for the Father is with me,"<sup>6</sup> said the Johannine Christ when faced with the desertion of the disciples and the dereliction of the passion; and this solidarity with the Father is emphasized throughout the fourth gospel. "The Father is in me and I am in the Father;"<sup>7</sup> and even more precisely, "I and the Father are one;"<sup>8</sup> and "he who has seen me has seen the Father."<sup>9</sup> So, in some sense, "in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell,"<sup>10</sup> or, at least, the whole N.T. says so.

Indeed, the entire Christian faith rests upon the belief that "God was in Christ";<sup>11</sup> that is to say, upon the conviction that the transcendent God and the realm of material, terrestrial history met in a unique manner in the total event of Christ's life, death, and resurrection; and it has always rested upon such a conviction. For, as D. M. Baillie pointed out, the recognition that there has been development in theological ideas about the person of Christ "does not mean that even the earliest of the four gospels is free from Christology, or that we can get back to any stage, however early,

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 14:10.<sup>2</sup> Jn. 5:30 ff.<sup>3</sup> Jn. 8:28.<sup>4</sup> Mk. 3:35.<sup>5</sup> Lk. 11:20.<sup>6</sup> Jn. 16:32.<sup>7</sup> Jn. 10:38.<sup>8</sup> Jn. 10:30.<sup>9</sup> Jn. 14:9.<sup>10</sup> Col. 1:19.<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. 5:19.

in the formation of the gospel tradition, when it was a plain tale without Christology. The days are past when the line could be drawn as easily as that, and we can see now that the telling of the story of Jesus was Christological through and through from the start."<sup>1</sup> In effect, this means that Jesus cannot be considered apart from God. "We never find anything there (i.e. in the N.T.) that could be called a Jesus cult, or a Christology interested simply in the question of who or what Jesus was apart from the action of God the Father. Whatever Jesus was or did, in His life, in His teaching, in His cross and passion, in His resurrection and ascension and exaltation, it is really God that did it in Jesus: that is how the New Testament speaks."<sup>2</sup> So Professor Baillie could conclude that "a toned down Christology is absurd. It must be all or nothing — all or nothing on both the divine and the human side."<sup>3</sup>

Leaving aside for the moment the consequences of this event for mankind, and remembering that a symbol is a coming together of a material thing and a transcendent reality, it is plain that both in the N.T. and in the traditional Christology of the Church, Christ is presented as the symbol of God. For, as has been seen, the fundamental ground of Christian faith is the conviction that the material man, Jesus, and the transcendent God were, in some sense, inseparable, and that the historical Jesus cannot be considered apart from God. The currency of the word, 'symbol', has been so debased, however, that three warnings must follow. First, to say that the N.T. *presents* Christ as the symbol of God is not necessarily the same thing as saying that Christ *is* the symbol of God. It is merely to say that, in the N.T., Christ is presented as being understandable only in terms of a complete unity of the material and the transcendent. Thus, secondly, to say that the N.T. presents him as the symbol of God is very different from saying that it presents him as "a bare symbol" or "merely as a symbol"; for, in the true

<sup>1</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ*, p. 60 (Faber & Faber, London, 1948).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

sense of the word, it can never be qualified by the words, 'bare' or 'mere' or 'only'. Once a symbol is qualified in such a way it ceases to be a symbol and becomes a conventional sign and unreal in itself. Thirdly, to say that Christ is presented by the N.T. as the symbol of God is not necessarily equivalent to saying that he is presented as no more than that. Whatever else the N.T. may say of him lies outside the scope of this essay which is concerned solely with symbolism. When properly understood, however, it is by no means a derogatory thing to say of him. For, in fact, it is to say with Hoskyns and Davey that, in the event of Christ, "the Word of God ceased to be expressed in a literature or in a prophecy, and became embodied in human flesh".<sup>1</sup> Since it is the nature and function of a symbol to embody and express a transcendent reality in and through a material thing, there could scarcely be a clearer presentation of Christ as the symbol of God than this, unless it be either that of the author of *Colossians* who said that "he is the image of the invisible God . . . for in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell,"<sup>2</sup> or that of St John who said that "the Word was made flesh".<sup>3</sup>

However, even if it be admitted that it is legitimate to say that the N.T. presents Christ as the symbol of God, in the sense in which that word has been defined here, it may still be objected that it is illegitimate to base any conclusions upon an argument from the symbols used in the arts to the Christ of the N.T., on the grounds that such a procedure overlooks the fact that the N.T. presents Christ as *sui generis*, whereas to compare him with artistic symbols would be to treat him merely as the supreme example of symbolism in general. But this objection cannot be upheld, for a similar argument could be used to contend that we can have no idea of the nature of Christ's obedience by comparing it with the lesser obedience of men, on the grounds that, by such a comparison, Christ would be made merely the supremely obedient man. As we have seen, this is

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Col. 1:15 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. 1:14, A.V.

certainly not how his obedience is presented by the N.T., which never regards him as merely an example of human obedience raised to its highest level; and yet the N.T. emphasizes his obedience as strongly as possible. The fact is that, if the very concept of obedience were wholly unintelligible to us; if we had gained no inkling of its meaning from our human relationships with fathers, mothers, masters, and friends; we should be wholly unable to recognize anything at all in the N.T. account of Christ's relationship with God that could be called obedience. It would be simply an unknown and unknowable quality, the existence of which we should be unable to notice or suspect. Moreover, if anything can be affirmed as historical about Jesus, it is that, in his teaching, he constantly and consistently used the lesser facts of human experience to illuminate the greater things of God. For instance, the propriety of his command to "ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" is illustrated by a parable which ends with the words, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Johannine Christ says to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"<sup>2</sup> It is only because there are some grounds for analogy from earthly to heavenly things that we can have any idea at all of the nature and realm of God. If it were otherwise, it could be argued that, because Jesus used human fatherhood as an illustration of the greater Fatherhood of God, therefore he taught that the Fatherhood of God is not *sui generis* but merely the supreme example of fatherhood in general. If the legitimacy of all earthly analogies with God be brought into question and denied on the grounds that they derogate his transcendence and uniqueness, inevitably we should be left with a God who is so completely ineffable that we could, by definition, have

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 7:7 ff.<sup>2</sup> Jn. 3:12.

no knowledge of him, even of his existence. We could neither speak nor think of him. Therefore, an attempt to discover whether anything can be learned of the Incarnation by analogy between the N.T. presentation of Christ and the symbols used in the arts cannot be disqualified on *a priori* grounds; and, in fact, the analogy is surprisingly close.

It will be remembered how it was shown that, in the arts, once the material component of a symbol becomes an end in itself, it defeats itself and its own object, which is to bear witness to the transcendent component of the symbol. This self-stultification is well exemplified by a work of complete and unrelieved *pastiche*, such as a Victorian piece of wax fruit. This is altogether unrelated to the art of sculpture. It is merely an object pretending to be something which it is not; whereas a piece of sculpture is a material bit of stone, wood, bronze, or other material, which does not pretend to be anything but what it is, and yet which somehow confronts the beholder with an idea which transcends the material piece of sculpture, in which it is embodied, and through which it is expressed. The beholder, when confronted by the work, is challenged to decide whether its idea be valuable and true or cheap and false. If wax fruit represents the most extreme lengths to which enthronement of the image can go, at the other extreme are found those supremely great works of art whose images, most clearly, economically, and completely, bear witness to the profound and transcendent ideas which they realize, embody, and express. They are, as it were, miraculous in their way of doing this. It is a never ending source of astonishment and wonder that, with such apparent simplicity and such meagre means, these works somehow manage to arouse in the perceptive beholder a deep and powerful awareness of something profoundly valuable transcending the limits of the material image in front of him. For attempts to discover this transcendent and profound value actually *in* the material image, by and through which it is mediated to the beholder, invariably end in a failure which only serves to emphasize its

elusiveness. The more the material image and its imagery is analysed and examined, the more the secret of its miracle eludes the grasp of the analyst. The image, treated as an object in itself, is so self-effacing that, under analysis, nothing so extraordinary is discoverable in it as to explain its surpassing quality. The colour, the drawing, the form, the design, the texture, and the like may be remarkable — though, usually, they are remarkable only for their extreme simplicity — but they are never sufficient, individually or collectively, to account for the value of the work; and this is most true of the greatest works. The analyst discovers that their material constituents and imagery are essentially ordinary, and this, is the one thing that he knows the works, themselves, not to be. But he only knows this, because their value is self-authenticating: that is to say, they will provide no other evidence of their value than that which is to be had in confrontation with the works themselves.

Theoretically, then, if there be any valid analogy between the N.T. presentation of Christ as the symbol of God and artistic symbols, it should prove impossible to find in the material image and imagery of Jesus something so extraordinary that belief in his divinity is explained. And that this is so is, surely, more than a mere part of the presentation by the tradition and the Evangelists; for, in fact, there is no more assured result of the biblical criticism of the last half century than its revelation of the ordinariness of the historical manhood of Jesus. That he was a real man, that he lived, that he taught, that he suffered, and that he died; so much yields itself to the grasp of the analytical historian with complete certainty, and as much may be said of many another historical figure. For the rest, the material man, Jesus, refuses to become the *terminus ad quem* of attraction or attention. Instead, he confronts the beholder with the transcendent God whom he claims to embody and express, and the man Jesus will not allow the beholder to stop short of this transcendent reality. To all who call him "good Teacher" and try to discover the clue to his elusive goodness

in himself, he replies, now as then, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."<sup>1</sup> For, now as then, the very ordinariness of Jesus, which provoked his incredulous contemporaries to say, "Is not this the carpenter's son?"<sup>2</sup> poses the same question, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"<sup>3</sup> And the only answer vouchsafed by the N.T. is, "From God."

This elusiveness of the man Jesus has been remarked by many biblical scholars. Hoskyns and Davey were of the opinion that "a biography of Jesus cannot be provided. Further, no single incident in His life or fragment of His teaching, if it be isolated from its context and detached, can be rendered intelligible, even if it be judged to be historical. From a mere collection of fragments selected from the whole tradition and arbitrarily declared authentic, no outline of the concrete figure of Jesus can be drawn which for one moment carries conviction. If such a selective method be adopted, we might picture a religious personality who taught the 'Brotherhood of Men' and 'Fatherhood of God'; or we might roughly sketch an ethical system on the basis of a few aphorisms, and suppose that Jesus was a teacher of Ethical Principles; or we might sketch the career of a reformer of Jewish piety; or we might discover a religious mystic, or disclose a man possessed of intense spiritual insight depending upon a peculiar religious experience; or indeed, by piecing together a different selection of fragments, we might equally well describe the Epiphany of a Divine Person who at no point touched human life as we know it. But these would be, not historical reconstructions, but simply selections of what seems to us convenient, or edifying, or useful, or monstrous."<sup>4</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, at one time, emphasized even more strongly the elusiveness of Jesus, when he said that "the form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us . . . And perhaps the more we ponder the matter, the more

<sup>1</sup> Mk. 10:18.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 13:55.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 13:54.

<sup>4</sup> E. Hoskyns and N. Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

clearly we shall understand the reason for it, and thereafter shall not wish it otherwise."<sup>1</sup>

The reason for it is perhaps not so hard to find, if it be granted that the Christ of the N.T. is presented as the symbol of God; for, in the perfect symbol of God, the material image of Jesus must point beyond himself to the transcendent reality of the invisible God, since this is precisely what the perfect image of the perfect symbol must do if it is to be perfect. In so far as the image were to draw attention to itself, to that extent it would be less than perfect as an image. And, in fact, implicitly or explicitly, the whole N.T. emphasizes the self-effacement of Jesus: the reticence of the image. For instance, Mark recounts that "the Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.'"<sup>2</sup> Matthew and Luke give variations of the Q version of this saying, according to which Jesus added enigmatically that "no sign shall be given . . . except the sign of Jonah".<sup>3</sup> After a careful discussion of the various suggestions which have been put forward to explain this saying, including Matthew's editorial gloss,<sup>4</sup> T. W. Manson has said that, if we wish to understand its meaning, "we must ask what those who asked for a sign wanted. The answer is that they wanted something that would authenticate Jesus to them, prove to them that He was indeed God's messenger to them. Then presumably the Ninevites might have put the same demand before Jonah: and if Jonah had produced some miracle to prove his bona fides, that would be Jonah's sign. But in the story of Jonah no such sign is asked by the Ninevites or given by Jonah. Jonah himself was the only sign to the people. That can only mean that he and his message were such that of themselves they carried

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, ad fin (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> Mk. 8:11 f.

<sup>3</sup> Lk. 11:29; Mt. 12:39.

<sup>4</sup> Mt. 12:40.

conviction to the Ninevites. People listening to Jonah recognized the voice of God. That, and only that, is what will be given to this generation . . . Jesus himself is the sign, the only sign, that will be given. The Q passage is then in real agreement with Mark viii 11 f. It refuses just as definitely as Mark viii 12 the request for a supernatural vindication of Jesus. It is to be noted that Jesus as His own sign differs from Jonah in one respect. Jonah only preached. Jesus both preaches and acts. His ministry is the manifestation of the Kingdom. And in Him the Kingdom is self-authenticating."<sup>1</sup>

That this is the right interpretation seems probable, not only because it agrees with Mark, but because it agrees with the teaching of the further Q saying which follows in both Matthew and Luke, and which associates the "men of Nineveh" with the "the queen of the South". It is said of both that "they will arise at the judgement with the men of this generation and condemn them".<sup>2</sup> The queen of the South who "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" is, of course, the Queen of Sheba, and the point of the saying is that, while she, a heathen princess, made a long and dangerous journey in order to come to such revelation as was available to her in her own day, the contemporaries of Jesus are not satisfied with what is available to them, despite the fact that, at no cost to themselves, they are confronted with "a greater than Solomon". They do not want to see God in, through, and by the ordinary person of Jesus, for this is not enough for them. Instead, they want proof — a "sign from heaven" — to authenticate that which should be self-authenticating, but which they find too self-effacing because they cannot see beyond the earthly image to its heavenly component. But Jesus refuses to satisfy them, because the self-effacing image can only mediate the transcendent God to those who have eyes to see: that is to say, by confrontation. For "the eye is the lamp of the body.

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, pp. 90 f. (S.C.M. Press, London, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Lk. 11:31 f.; Mt. 12:41 f.

So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"<sup>1</sup> St Paul's way of saying the same thing was to tell the Christians in Rome that "to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace".<sup>2</sup> That St Paul was right had been fully shown in the lifetime of Jesus, when the minds of his own countrymen, long accustomed to the flesh of Jesus, were unable to see the Spirit in him, so that "he marvelled because of their unbelief".<sup>3</sup>

This is not the place to discuss in detail the problems involved in the Marcan account of the commands to silence given by Jesus to various people, who are said to have recognized that he was the Messiah, and who are told not to publish their knowledge abroad but to keep it secret. The historicity of these injunctions to secrecy has often been called in question, and various interpretations have been put upon them. But it is perhaps permissible to say here that, whether Jesus actually used the words imputed to him by Mark or not, it seems probable that they are a true representation of his behaviour and intentions in history, for they are consistent with a reticence that can be pronounced historical on other grounds. Austin Farrer came to this conclusion when, in answer to his own question, "Did Christ reveal himself with the degree and sort of reserve St Mark describes?" he replied that he found in himself "no power to conceive Christ's mission otherwise".<sup>4</sup> If this be so, whatever may be thought of the historicity of the individual sayings attributed to Jesus in the fourth gospel, many of which bear witness to the same reticence, there is no more reason to doubt their underlying truth than there is to doubt that of the Marcan sayings. On the contrary, the sayings in St John's gospel make

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 6:22 ff.; cf. Lk. 11:34 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 8:6.

<sup>3</sup> Mk. 6:1 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Austin Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark*, p. 246 (A. & C. Black, London, 1951).

explicit that which is implicit in the synoptic gospels. "If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true,"<sup>1</sup> said the Johannine Christ, succinctly epitomizing the behaviour of the synoptic Jesus and the role of a self-effacing image; and again, quite clearly, "I do not receive glory from men."<sup>2</sup> In fact, the perfect "image of the invisible God" will neither absorb the attention of those who behold him — the attention which should pass through and beyond him to God — nor take to himself the credit for the light which shines through him from God into the darkness of a godless world for all who, when they are confronted by him, have eyes to see it.

But the dominical miracles take at least as prominent a place in the gospels as does the reticence of Jesus, and no satisfactory account of him can be given if they be disregarded. There is, of course, no *a priori* reason to disbelieve the miraculous stories of the N.T. Absolute denials of their intrinsic possibility can only arise from prejudiced assumptions about the nature of the possible and the impossible. However, it is impossible to prove that they did, indeed, happen. For even if a similar event were to occur to-day, and if it were to be given the widest possible publicity in the newspapers, on the wireless, and in other ways, there would still be people who would believe and others who would not believe in its actuality. Even among the eye-witnesses, there would inevitably be some who, in retrospect, would account for what they had seen on grounds of delusion, hypnosis, suggestion, or trickery. Moreover, the N.T. itself, which provides every ground for believing the reticence of Jesus to be historically true, provides sufficient grounds for reasonable doubt of the historical eventuality of some of the miracles to be entertained. For instance, the miraculous cursing of the fig tree, recounted by Mark,<sup>3</sup> appears in Luke only in the form of a parable.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Luke recounts a parable, featuring a man called Lazarus, which ends

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 5:31.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. 5:41.

<sup>3</sup> Mk. 11:12 ff.; cf. Mt. 21:18 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Lk. 13:6 ff.

with a warning that if men do not heed the word of God in Holy Scripture, neither will they regard its truth even "if some one should rise from the dead".<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in the fourth gospel, a man called Lazarus does rise from the dead through the miraculous intervention of Jesus, and, while some of the Jews "believed in him" as a result, others prepare to destroy him.<sup>2</sup> It is, then, possible on critical and historical grounds to come to the conclusion that some or all of the accounts of miracles may be dramatized versions of parables. But, if it is impossible either to say dogmatically that the miracles could not, and therefore did not, happen, or to say definitely that they did occur, it is profitless to discuss them solely from the point of view of their historical eventuality. Of course, their intrinsic probability can, and indeed should, be assessed; but, even so, since it is certain that the faith of the early Church was not primarily a result of nicely balanced assessments of their historical probability, the writers of the N.T. must have recounted these stories for some reason other than their unvarnished historicity.

From the point of view of the Evangelists, the dominical miracles were demonstrative claims that the Messianic promises of the O.T. had been fulfilled in Jesus, through whom the prerogative powers of God had visibly worked. Regarded as such, there is every reason to suppose them representative of the historical fact that Jesus saw in himself the irruption of the kingdom of God and the dawn of the Messianic age. It would be impossible to defend this statement within the scope of this chapter or, indeed, of this book, but a typical passage from Matthew may be cited in its support. It is recounted how John the Baptist in prison sends a mission to Jesus to ask him if he be, indeed, the Messiah. Jesus replies by saying, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lk. 16:19-31.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. 11:1-53.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 11:2 ff.

This is an unmistakable reference to the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messianic age that says of it that "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy".<sup>1</sup> In the Lucan version of this incident, the miracles are not merely reported; they are worked on the spot with John's disciples as witnesses of them; and again they are presented as demonstrations that Jesus is, indeed, "he who is to come". Similarly, in Mark's gospel, the healing of a deaf man who stammered<sup>2</sup> is treated as an example of the fulfilment of the same Isaianic prophecy. In Mark, the reference to Isaiah is made even more unmistakable by the use of the word, *μοιλάλος*, for a stammerer. This occurs twice only in the Bible: once here in Mark, and once in the Septuagint version of this Isaianic passage. Thus the dominical miracles are presented by the Evangelists, not as bare facts in themselves, but as evidence that, in Jesus and his Ministry, the Messianic age had come. Whether these things happened historically or not, the significance of the miracle stories still lies in the witness they bear to the belief that something transcending history was working through Jesus in history. As such, they signify no more and no less than such a saying as, "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you;"<sup>3</sup> for they pose the question, Was the power of God in Jesus? Thus, one could say of the miracles, the same as has been said of the parables: namely, that they compel one "to come to a decision about his (Jesus') person and mission. For they are all full of 'the secret of the kingdom of God.'"<sup>4</sup> They, too, pose the question, Was God in Christ? It cannot be answered only by resort to historical research or by attempts to prove that the miracles happened. For, even if it could be proved, for instance, that a man who stammered

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 35:5 f.<sup>2</sup> Mk. 7:31 ff.<sup>3</sup> Lk. 11:20.<sup>4</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. by S. H. Hooke, p. 159 (S.C.M. Press, London, 1954).

was actually and historically cured of his impediment by Jesus, this would prove only that he was cured; and this, in itself, would not prove that God was in Christ.

However, the *locus classicus* for the relationship between the self-effacing image of Jesus and the transcendent power of God is to be found in the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It has rightly been stressed, again and again, that Crucifixion and Resurrection are not two events, but the beginning and ending of one event. For there was not first a defeat, which was followed later by a victory. God did not reverse a defeat on the Cross. On the contrary, the Easter victory was won on the Cross and completed in the Resurrection. The view of the N.T. is that it was on the Cross that "he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him".<sup>1</sup> So Paul could say, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Bultmann has pointed out, the Resurrection by itself "cannot be a visible fact in the realm of human history,"<sup>3</sup> for "all that historical criticism can establish is the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection. The historian can perhaps to some extent account for that faith . . . but the historical event of the rise of the Easter faith means for us what it meant for the first disciples — namely, the self-manifestation of the risen Lord, the act of God in which the redemptive event of the cross is completed."<sup>4</sup> Whatever Bultmann may mean exactly by "a visible event", if Jesus' death was the victory

<sup>1</sup> Col. 2:15.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 1:23 f.; cf. Gal. 3:1. The fact that it was on the Cross that the victory was won and completed is underlined, in the fourth gospel, when Christ says, "It is finished." Since the work of God is complete, the effusion of the Spirit can follow at once (Jn. 19:34). The latent implications of Mk. 15:38 and 39 are the same.

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 295 (S.C.M. Press, London, 1952).

<sup>4</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 42.

over the power of death, then the Crucifixion and Resurrection must be regarded as one event — one victory — in which both the dying man and the living God were indissolubly involved. That the victory was realized (made real) by the Cross, and that the living God transcended the dying man, in whom he was embodied, was expressed in the Resurrection of that man. Thus, once again, the pattern of realization, embodiment, and expression is found. But if the Resurrection be the expression of the transcendent victory of the death on the Cross, it is only in and through the image of the crucified Christ that the risen Christ can be apprehended truly as victor over death; for, without the death on the Cross, the Resurrection would not have been a victory over death. So the Resurrection must be regarded as the triumphant expression of the victory already won. Thus the Cross and Resurrection event, too, is presented as analogous to a symbolic event in that there is a coming together into unity of fact and reality of a material image, the crucified, with a transcendent reality, the resurrected: a coming together of the dead man with the living God in the risen Christ. Here, the self-effacing reticence of the crucified image is made perfect and complete, for self-effacement can go no further than death, in order that the transcendent reality of God's victory, power, and love may be perfectly expressed in and through that image.

Is this to strain the analogy with artistic symbols to breaking-point and, indeed, beyond it to the point of offence? Before replying too hastily in the affirmative, it may be recalled that it was said that there can never be an objective standard of judgement in the arts, simply because that which is to be judged is never a mere object;<sup>1</sup> and this, surely, is supremely true of the death and Resurrection of Christ. When Bultmann speaks of "the difficulty of establishing the objective historicity of the resurrection no matter how many witnesses are cited, as though once it was established it might be believed beyond all question, and faith might have

<sup>1</sup> *Vide supra*, p. 32.

its unimpeachable guarantee,"<sup>1</sup> is he not saying, in effect, that the Resurrection can never be regarded as being merely objective and historical, simply because the action of God can never be a mere object in history? If this be what he means, he is right; for the action of God must always be the intrusion of something into history which transcends both objectivity and historicity. Then the analogy with artistic symbols is very close, for, in precisely the same way, it is impossible to establish the objective value of a work of art, however great it may be; for the man who argues that Michelangelo's *David* is merely a lump of carved stone which means nothing to him, or that Duccio's *Maesta* is merely a piece of painted wood which looks to him no different from any other piece, can never be provided with objective proof that he is wrong. Indeed, Hegel's definition of what is needed for artistic perception<sup>2</sup> could be applied with equal pertinence to what is needed for Easter faith, if it be adapted so as to read that such faith is faith in the power, action, and love of God "only as brought into unity with a concrete sensuous phenomenon", namely the Cross. In fact, Bultmann makes exactly this point, when he says that the N.T. "claims that faith only became possible at a definite point in history in consequence of an *event* — viz., the event of Christ. Faith in the sense of obedient self-commitment and inward detachment from the world is only possible when it is faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> A sceptic can be persuaded by historical argument to believe only that the material man, Jesus, suffered a material death. But a Christian sees the action and the love of God "as brought into unity with" that concrete, historical death; and if the sceptic says that, to him, it is merely a material death, the Christian can furnish no objective proof that it was more than that, for the 'something more' — the Resurrection — was not a mere object.

But if, throughout the N.T., Christ is presented as being

<sup>1</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 39 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide supra*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 22.

the invisible God working in and through the reticent image of Jesus for those with eyes to see, the problem still remains as to what is the relationship between the N.T. presentation of Christ as, in this sense, the symbol of God and the real Christ who stands behind the N.T. Full consideration of this problem must be deferred until later; but perhaps, in passing, it would be worth looking a little more closely here at the analogy with artistic symbols. For what is the relationship between, say, a Cézanne landscape and the reality? Cézanne, confronted with a real bit of the material world, by means of an obscure mode of apprehension was aware of something implicit in, and yet transcending, the material spectacle; and this seemed to him to be valuable. What this 'something' was, it is impossible to put into words, for Cézanne has put it into paint once for all; but for the sake of clear discussion one may say that this 'something' was a vital order and harmony in, and yet transcending, the material spectacle of light, rock, vegetation, and sky. The finished painting is a symbol, or coming together into unity, of the idea of this apprehended and transcendent order and the material imagery of the painted canvas; and in the finished painting the transcendent order is somehow emphasized and made plainer than it was in the reality. In the reality it was largely hidden; whereas in the symbol it is revealed and laid bare.

The symbol, then, confronts the spectator with the question, Is this true? Was Cézanne right to believe that the material world is the kind of place in which is implicit a vital order and harmony of this kind? This cannot be answered only by resort to geology, chemistry, or physics. It must be answered by using the obscure aesthetic mode of apprehending the truth, or not at all. A question similar to this will be posed by every great work of art. If one can say that, however much misapplication of the truth may be present, and however much error may have crept in with the truth, ultimately the picture contains and mediates a genuine truth about the world, then the question is answered, and the

work is justified. It is a great work of art. For example, in the case of a Cézanne, while the world which he painted is 'real' and his painting is 'only a symbol', the painting does indeed reveal something profoundly true about the material world which was previously hidden; and it is in this revelation that the value of the work lies. In short, the value of Cézanne's work is that it constrains you to say that the world is a place in which is implicit the kind of transcendent order and harmony apprehended by the painter. But, if this be so, there must be a sense in which the real world, too, must be regarded as a coming together of material reality and a transcendent order; and the relationship between the painting and the thing painted, symbol and reality, is one in which the symbol makes clear, in the only way in which clarity may be achieved, the full nature of the reality. Or, to put this another way, no ontology of the real world would be complete, were it to leave out of account the harmonious order apprehended by Cézanne in and under the material phenomena which he painted. Moreover, an exact description of the material spectacle could not do what Cézanne has done, for it would necessarily stop short of anything transcending materiality.

If the relationship between the N.T. presentation of Christ and the real Christ is analogous, then the original disciples, the tradition-bearers, and the Evangelists, confronted with a real bit of material history — the event of Christ — by means of an obscure mode of apprehension, faith, were convinced that, embodied in this material event, was "the whole fulness of deity".<sup>1</sup> In their presentation of this event, the deity is emphasized and made plain, for it is the purpose of symbolic presentation to emphasize the transcendent components of its symbols in such a way that they are made plainer than they were in the material reality. But, if there be any truth whatsoever in the Christian faith, there must also be a sense in which God was, in very fact and reality, implicit in the real Jesus who stands behind the

<sup>1</sup> Col. 2:9.

symbolic presentation of the N.T. That is to say, there must be a sense in which the transcendent God came together with the man Jesus in Christ. As in the arts, so here, exact description could only have described the material event and would necessarily have stopped short of the transcendent God. Therefore the full truth of Christ could have been conveyed only in symbols.

As products of a materialist age, in which the arts are discounted as revealing something basically unreal — an age in which reality is assumed to be co-extensive with material phenomena — we tend to shy away from the conclusion that the full reality of Christ can be revealed only by symbols. But this tendency reveals only the strength of our materialist presuppositions and prejudices. In fact, both the Christian faith and the arts stand or fall upon the reality of a mode of being which has this affinity with symbols, that a living and transcendent realm can and does reveal itself by coming into union with material things: in the arts, always imperfectly; in Christ, perfectly and completely. If, on *a priori* epistemological grounds, the ontological possibility of this kind of union be denied, the arts can have no value except as stimulators of pleasing emotions and fosterers of enjoyable delusions; and Christianity, too, must be classed as valuable, not for any truth that it reveals, but for the socially and individually expedient delusions which it arouses, encourages, and sustains. On the other hand, if there be any sense in which it is ultimately true to say that "God was in Christ", then there stands at the centre of the Christian faith, as its *fons et origo*, an event which can be expressed only in symbols, and apprehended only through them; simply because, in itself, the event transcends the limitations of material eventuality, and therefore the scope of material description.

But once this is recognized, certain consequences follow. First and foremost, it becomes obvious that the presentation — the preaching — of Christ must always be subject to the conditions which govern symbolic communication. Amongst

other things, this means that to concentrate upon the bare, historical humanity of Jesus — his historicity, human nobility, physical suffering, morality, and the rest — is to obscure the gospel and to defeat the ends of Christian preaching; for such a concentration upon the humanity of Jesus can only rivet attention to the material image, where that image should pass the attention to the transcendent God. In fact, such preaching is *pastiche* preaching. It presents and enthrones at second-hand and for its own sake imagery which, because it has not been understood, can only masquerade as the gospel; and the result will be a lifeless and stultifying copy of the original that obscures, rather than reveals, the truth. Similarly, to concentrate upon the objective reality of such things as the miracles, whether they happened or not, must inevitably be to obscure their significance; for it is to reduce the transcendent to terms of the material. As products of a post-humanist and still materialist age, our natural desire is to know what the first disciples saw. But precisely what they saw it is impossible to say and even, perhaps, undesirable to ask. At least, this seems to have been the teaching of the Johannine Christ when he said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."<sup>1</sup> In any case, precisely what the disciples saw, we do not know. It is certain only that, confronted with Jesus, they 'saw' — or knew themselves to be confronted with — the power and the love of God which was in and through him; and this especially on Calvary. Somehow, by an obscure mode of apprehension, in the complete impotence of the crucified they were confronted with the complete omnipotence of God; in the death of a man, with the conquest of death by God. There can be no more complete or perfect example of the impossibility of finding by analysis of the material image, real and objective, but humble and reticent as it is, the true value of its transcendent component. Yet the subsequent behaviour of the disciples is

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 20:29.

evidence of the fact that they were passionately and overwhelmingly convinced of the reality of that transcendence. They knew it, as a man knows that he is confronted with something infinitely more valuable than merely a lump of stone when he stands in front of Michelangelo's *David*. But in artistic symbols the spectator is always confronted with something which is less than perfect and, even in the greatest work, with something that is known to be only *primus inter pares*. Whereas, in Christ, the disciples were confronted with something which they knew to be unique: God.

At first sight, this may appear to be a covert form of subjective idealism or Docetism. But for two reasons it is not. First, far from denying the reality and objectivity of Jesus' historical manhood, it asserts the necessity of regarding it as both real and ordinary. For it is only in and through the objective, historical, material event of Jesus that the transcendent God is known. Thus, it no more denies the historical objectivity of the flesh of Jesus than an affirmation of the transcendent truth and value of a painting can be said to deny the objective reality of the material picture. In fact, both affirmations of transcendent value depend for their validity upon the real, material existence of their respective images. Secondly, it says of *Christ* alone that "he is the image of the invisible God". It does not go on to say that therefore all men are images of God, let alone that they are mere shadows of the ideal. Its implications for the doctrine of man must await the next chapter; but, certainly, they are not idealist in any usual sense of that term.

What, however, it does do is to make intelligible the fact that, when the root of the Christian faith is uncovered, so often its nature seems to be paradoxical. For, if the Christian faith is rooted in an event which is expressible only in terms of symbolism, then the analysis of that faith must result in paradox. This must be so, because, if a symbol is a coming together in unity of a material thing with a transcendent reality with which it is not 'naturally' compatible,

the analysis of that symbol can only reveal two incompatibles, since analysis is, by its nature, the examination of the component structure of the thing analysed, leading to the identification of its constituent parts. Thus, since a paradox is precisely the simultaneous assertion of two incompatibles, paradox will always result from the analysis of a symbol. The full consideration of this must also be deferred; but, in passing, it is worth noticing here that, although the analysis of a symbol must always result in a paradox, a symbol is not the same thing as a paradox. For the essence of a symbol is its internal unity, while the nature of a paradox is the precarious balance of its parts and therefore its potential duality.

Yet another consequence of the recognition that the Christian faith rests upon an event, which can be understood and expressed only in symbolic terms, is that the symbols which are derivative from the central and fundamental Christological symbol cannot be dismissed as ontological impossibilities, pantheist accretions, or mere illustrations, until each has been examined on its merits. Furthermore, it will be in such a study that the place of symbolism in the understanding of the redemptive consequence of the event of Christ for mankind will be assessed.

## THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

IT has often been remarked that the idea of man as being made in the image of God is foreign to the Hebraic mind, and that it was imported into the O.T. by the Jews of the dispersion at the time of their developing contact with Hellenism, and as a result of this contact. The reasons for refusing to accept this concept as a biblical one, though not regarded as definitive by all O.T. scholars, have been summarized by Vladimir Lossky, and are worth quoting at length; for it is important clearly to understand them.

"The reasons advanced by certain Protestant theologians," Lossky has said, "who would like to exclude the 'theology of the image' from the essentials of Christianity can find support on a sound knowledge of biblical vocabulary. So Karl Barth in his *Dogmatik*<sup>1</sup> declares that the teachings of the Fathers of the Church about the 'theology of the image' were entirely invented, without any scriptural foundation. Emil Brunner,<sup>2</sup> who is less categorical, nevertheless concludes that 'the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, however much one wishes to bring this term back to a definite conception, does not play an important part in the Bible'. Anders Nygren in *Agape and Eros*<sup>3</sup> eliminates the theme of the image, quoting E. Lehmann, who says: 'The argument which is most formally opposed to "creation in the image of God" is that it is wholly lacking from the O.T. If it had been a more ordinary idea, it would often have been employed, or even exploited, in the many passages bearing on the relations of God and man. But the prophets, the Psalms, Job, even Deuteronomy (which is so human), not one of them speaks of this essential likeness between God and

<sup>1</sup> III, 1, p. 216 (1945).

<sup>2</sup> *Der Mensch im Widerspruch*... Berlin, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> I, p. 257.

man' . . . And the same writer adds: 'It is not by chance that this theory of man in God's image only grew up at the precise moment when the Greek language appeared in the religious literature of Judaism' . . . Lehmann and Nygren simply wanted to say that the theme of the image of God is foreign to revelation: it is an hellenic contribution which we owe to the Platonic and Stoic associations already latent in the terms *εἰκών* and *ὁμοίωσις*, in the translation of the Book of Genesis by the Septuagint, about the third or second century before Christ. These ideas are developed in the Book of Wisdom, written in Greek about the middle of the first century before our era. In fact, we find there<sup>1</sup> a paraphrase of 'Let us make man in our own image' which gives man in his vocation the attributes of incorruptibility and conformity with God in what is proper to him (*ιδιότητος*), or, according to another version, conformity with his eternity (*αιδιότητος*). In the same book,<sup>2</sup> Wisdom, co-creator of the universe, makes God known in creation: she is the *ἀπαύγασμα* — the reflection (or radiance) of the eternal light, the 'unspotted mirror of the working of God', the 'image (*εἰκών*) of his excellency'. This is almost the second hypostasis of middle Platonism or the Logos of Philo . . . The precise facts appealed to by the theologians who are opposed to the patristic doctrine of the image must be admitted by all who, as they face the text of the O.T., are unwilling to close their eyes to the history of the formation of the Biblical Canon. So they will recognize that the Hebraic *selem* and *d'mut*, governed by the prepositions *be* and *ke*, in Genesis 1:26 (which give: 'in our image, as our likeness'), have not the positive and direct force of *κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμῶν, καθ' ὁμοίωσιν ἡμῶν* of the translation of the Septuagint. In the context of the sacerdotal narrative of Genesis, the creation of man 'in the image' of God confers on human beings a dominion over the animals analogous to that which God enjoys over the whole of his creation. If, as is sometimes supposed, this text is aimed

<sup>1</sup> *Wis.* 2:23.<sup>2</sup> *Wis.* 7:26.

against the Egyptian cult of theriomorphic gods, the expression 'in the image' would have a mainly negative meaning: the animals have nothing of the divine, for only man is made 'in the image' of God. But it has also been noticed that the expression 'after our likeness' ought to limit still further the positive force of 'in our image', perhaps to avoid at the same time the Persian myth of the 'heavenly man': man is *only in the image* — he has only a certain distant analogy with the Lord through the place which he occupies among earthly creatures. Evidently all this is too thin for us to be able to speak of an O.T. doctrine of the 'image of God', except in negative terms: the God of Israel, Creator of the heaven and the earth, has nothing in common with the divinities of the other nations. He has no image, human or animal in form, which could be worshipped. This is in complete harmony with the formal prohibition of any plastic representation of God.<sup>1</sup> 'Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves: for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure whatsoever.' 'Yahveh spake to you then out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude, only ye heard a voice'<sup>2</sup> . . . In the purely Hebraic text of the Bible, interpreted in the historic context in which the books of the O.T. were edited, there is nothing (or almost nothing) which would permit us to base either a knowledge of God or a religious anthropology on the notion of the image of God.<sup>3</sup>

This conclusion must be accepted. No Christian doctrine of man can be built directly on the isolated and late use of the word 'image' in the O.T. On the contrary, it cannot be too clearly recognized that the typical O.T. view of man was that he was a fallen creature, over against God and separated

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 4:16.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 4:12.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Theology of the Image*. Article in *Sobornost*, Series 3, No. 22, pp. 510 ff. (1957-8).

from him, and thus that he was the very reverse of God's image as that word has been defined, and is being used here. J. A. T. Robinson has rightly pointed out that, in the O.T., "true individuality was seen to be grounded solely in the indivisible responsibility of each man to God . . . All Hebrew thinking was done, as it were, in this vertical dimension of man's relatedness to God as a creature and as a fallen creature. The Hebrew never abstracted man from this relationship and set him on a pedestal, apart from the rest of creation, to exclaim 'What a piece of work is man!' Rather, viewing him in the context of God's total handiwork, he was led to ask: 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that *thou* art mindful of him? And the son of man that *thou* visitest him?' "<sup>1</sup>

Such a view of man as being over against God is typical, not only of the O.T. doctrine of man, but also of the N.T. doctrine of man before Christ. For the N.T., men before Christ "were enemies" of God;<sup>2</sup> they were "estranged and hostile in mind".<sup>3</sup> Of the two groups into which they were divided, Jew and Gentile, the Gentiles were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world;"<sup>4</sup> while, amongst the Jews, even the heroes of Israel in O.T. times "died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar".<sup>5</sup> For, although the advantage of the old covenant to the Jew was great: namely, to be "entrusted with the oracles of God,"<sup>6</sup> Paul could say that, ultimately, there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile "since all have sinned".<sup>7</sup> Thus, for the N.T., man before Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, was in a radically different position from man after Christ; "for he is our peace, who has made us both one."<sup>8</sup> This is entirely consonant with the saying that "the

<sup>1</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body*, p. 15 f. (S.C.M. Press, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 5:10.

<sup>3</sup> Col. 1:21.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 2:12.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. 11:13.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 3:2.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 3:23.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. 2:14.

law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the news is good precisely because, although "among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he".<sup>2</sup> So one comes back to the opening words of the last chapter; namely, that the fundamental postulate of the gospel, upon which all else depends, is that man's position in the world has been radically changed by the action of God in Christ. No doctrine of man that lessens the force of that contention, or which tends to under-emphasize the revolution wrought by Christ in man's standing with God, can be accepted as Christian for a moment.

The exact nature of this change in man's status is most clearly explained in the Pauline and deutero-Pauline literature, though the fact of the change is recognized throughout the N.T. As has been said already, it is that the state of separation between God and man — the result of sin and inescapable in O.T. times — has been done away by Christ.<sup>3</sup> Instead, man has been "reconciled" to God. This new relationship of man with God is the result of God's action and initiative; "for by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God".<sup>4</sup> And "the free gift is not like the trespass . . . for the judgment following the trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification".<sup>5</sup> So where, in O.T. times, "sin reigned in death"<sup>6</sup> over all men who, *volens volens*, were in bondage to it and to its consequences, in the new age inaugurated by Christ men are "as men who have been brought from death to life".<sup>7</sup> So Paul could remind the disciples that they must consider themselves "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus".<sup>8</sup> Sin will have no more dominion over them, because they

<sup>1</sup> Lk. 16:16.<sup>2</sup> Mt. 11:11.<sup>3</sup> Gal. 4:1-7, cf. Rom. 8; Heb. 7:19; Jn. 10:9 f.<sup>4</sup> Eph. 2:8; cf. Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:10.<sup>5</sup> Rom. 5:15 f.<sup>6</sup> Rom. 5:21.<sup>7</sup> Rom. 6:13.<sup>8</sup> Rom. 6:11.

have been set free from its toils.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, freedom from sin — a freedom which can be had only as a gift of God through Christ — is both the result and the determinative characteristic of man's new relationship with God.

Since sin, for the Bible, is the enthronement of the self in the place of God,<sup>2</sup> and since a life of sin is a life of self-aggrandizement, freedom from sin is freedom from self. It takes the form of the enthronement of God in the place where, previously, the self has been enthroned: namely, the heart of a man. Moreover, the enthronement of God in a man's heart should lead to a life of God-assertion, as it were, and the aggrandizement of God where, before, the self was both asserted and aggrandized. Thus, freedom from sin should result in a new kind of life with a completely new motivation and orientation; and the whole N.T. proclaims that this is so. It bears witness to the experienced reality of an entirely new kind of life which is possible because of the event of Christ. Indeed, for the N.T., Christianity is always a way of life now, because of an event in the historical past: the experience of the Holy Spirit now, because of Christ's sacrifice and conquest on the Cross: a divine *now* rooted in a divine *then*. It is to the visible evidence — a present reality — of this new kind of life that appeal is made by the earliest Church as one of the two chief credentials of Christ's significance, the evidence of eye-witnesses of the Resurrection being the other. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out *this which you see and hear* . . . Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Church's chief credential is the visible evidence of this new kind of life, as

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 6:22.

<sup>2</sup> Sin is trespass only for the O.T., not for the N.T. And even in the O.T. trespass is the result of self-idolatry.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:32 ff.

for instance, when it was decided that baptism could not be withheld from the Gentiles in face of the evident fact that they, too, had received the gift which characterized the new kind of life: namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"<sup>1</sup> In the Pauline literature, too, the new life which is possible to man because of Christ could not be given greater prominence. So Paul could tell his correspondents in Rome that both he and they "were buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life".<sup>2</sup> Of himself, he could say, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the radically new character of Christian living could be summed up in the saying that "if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God."<sup>4</sup> The same conviction is expressed in the fourth gospel, not only in the words of the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God,"<sup>5</sup> but also in the emphasis upon the fact that Christ is "the resurrection and the life";<sup>6</sup> that "in him was life, and the life was the light of men";<sup>7</sup> that it is not in the scriptures that life is to be found but in Christ himself;<sup>8</sup> and that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you".<sup>9</sup>

Regardless, for a moment, of the much debated problem of whether they are to be understood literally or merely metaphorically, the plain words of the N.T. are to the effect that this new life, which is the characteristic experience of the Church, is new, simply because it is, in some sense, not the life received from God at birth, but the life of the risen Christ, imparted to the disciples by him, and experienced by them as a gift from him. Paul no longer lives, but Christ

<sup>1</sup> Acts 10:47.<sup>2</sup> Rom. 6:4.<sup>3</sup> Gal. 2:20.<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17 f.<sup>5</sup> Jn. 3:3.<sup>6</sup> Jn. 11:25.<sup>7</sup> Jn. 1:4.<sup>8</sup> Jn. 5:39 f.<sup>9</sup> Jn. 6:53.

lives in him.<sup>1</sup> Christians are "in Christ Jesus",<sup>2</sup> or simply "in Christ".<sup>3</sup> Apostles like Paul carry about in their own bodies the death of Jesus, "so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies;"<sup>4</sup> or even more precisely, "so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh".<sup>5</sup> Paul tells the disciples that they are not in the flesh, but Christ is in them.<sup>6</sup> He reminds them that they are temples of God; that God's spirit dwells in them;<sup>7</sup> that they are temples of the Holy Spirit;<sup>8</sup> and that they should have that mind in them "which was also in Christ Jesus".<sup>9</sup> They are the body of Christ and individually members of it.<sup>10</sup> They are exhorted to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint . . . upbuilds itself in love".<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the disciples are in the same relationship with Christ as a wife is with a husband: that is to say, in a one-flesh union. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Church corporate is the temple of God in which God's Spirit dwells;<sup>13</sup> the building in which Christ holds all together as "the chief corner-stone".<sup>14</sup>

All this is familiar enough, and it cannot be studied in detail here. It is well known that some scholars have concluded that the writers of the N.T. in general, and Paul in particular, were speaking in metaphors when they appear to identify Christ and the Church; while others have come to the opposite conclusion. For instance, E. Best concluded that "the phrase, 'the Body of Christ', is not . . . used realistically and ontologically but metaphorically in the N.T. . . . This holds also for those other phrases which we have-discussed concerning the relationship of Christ to his

<sup>1</sup> Gal. 2:20.      <sup>2</sup> Rom. 6:11; 8:2; Eph. 2:13.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 12:5; cf. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Gal. 2:17; 1 Cor. 15:22.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 4:10.      <sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 4:11.      <sup>6</sup> Rom. 8:9.      <sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. 3:16.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16.      <sup>9</sup> Phil. 2:5. A.V.      <sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:18.

<sup>11</sup> Eph. 4:16.      <sup>12</sup> Eph. 5:31 f.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21 f.

<sup>14</sup> Eph. 2:20.

Church."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Bishop of Woolwich has said that "one must be chary of speaking of 'the metaphor' of the Body of Christ. Paul uses the analogy of the human body to elucidate his teaching that Christians form Christ's body. But the analogy holds because they are in literal fact the risen organism of Christ's person in all its concrete reality . . . It is almost impossible to exaggerate the materialism and crudity of Paul's doctrine of the Church as literally now the resurrection *body* of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Somewhere between these two positions, Neville Clark has pointed out that "rightly to enunciate the relationship of identity and distinction between the crucified, the mystical, the sacramental, and the glorified body of the Lord may be, in the end, an impossible task; but it must again and again be attempted. We have seen that the Pauline exposition suggests identification of the Church with the resurrection body of Christ; but this simple equation must now be examined, qualified and plotted with greater precision. To fail to allow for the element of metaphor in the Pauline usage is the perennial danger of a wholly admirable and desperately needed endeavour to do justice to biblical realism at this point; and this error lies at the root of a too facile dismissal of the concept of the mystical body . . . Yet we cannot go on to claim unreservedly an identification of the Church with the ascended and glorified body of the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

The fact is that both those theologians who, with Best, support the metaphorical interpretation, and those who agree with Robinson in upholding the literal interpretation, are usually as careful as Neville Clark, first to emphasize the ambiguities and difficulties of the N.T. doctrine, and only then, on balance, to come to one conclusion or the other. For theologians in both camps find themselves in a dilemma. Those who would classify the union of Christ and the

<sup>1</sup> E. Best, *One Body in Christ*, p. 195 (S.P.C.K., 1955).

<sup>2</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 51 (S.C.M. Press, 1952). The italics are the Bishop's.

<sup>3</sup> Neville Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 79 (S.C.M. Press, 1956).

Church as a mere metaphor know that, as such, this is an inadequate account of the N.T. idea, and that therefore it must be qualified; while those who would interpret it literally as an ontological reality find it extremely difficult to define just what they mean by this and to reconcile their conclusion to any acceptable anthropology; and so this conclusion, too, has to be qualified. The problem resides in the fact that, while there can be little doubt that the N.T. speaks of the body of Christ as being something much more than a mere metaphor, in the modern sense of that term, it is very difficult to see how men can *be*, literally and in very fact, the risen Christ.

However, this dilemma is more apparent than real. Evidently there is no intrinsic difficulty in the biblical concept itself, or the author of *Ephesians* could not have written of it as he did. Whereas, in fact, he used it in order to teach people how to understand the unity of a husband and a wife, pointing to the relationship of Christ and the Church as the recognized standard or norm of unity, and assuming as a matter of course that this would be so readily intelligible to his readers that it would shed new light upon the real nature of a marital relationship.<sup>1</sup> Almost certainly, we should turn this upside down, using the marital relationship to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the Church. It seems possible, then, that our difficulty in understanding the biblical concept may arise from the upside-down-ness of our presuppositions, as compared with those of the N.T., rather than from any intrinsic difficulty in the concept itself. Thus, it is worth asking whether it may not be a consequence of the contemporary assumption that, in the doctrine of the body of Christ, theology is faced with an ontological either-or: *either* the N.T. is speaking of a literal, material reality, *or* it is using mere metaphors; where, for the N.T., there was another category of reality, the symbolic, which either we have altogether lost or we largely discount. It can hardly be denied that, whatever *we*

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 5:21-33.

may consider the Church to be, the N.T. *presents* it as being a coming together into an entirely new kind of unity of a number of material objects, the disciples, with a transcendent reality, the risen Christ, with whom the former are not naturally compatible. That is to say, it presents it as a symbol. Once it be allowed that, in the N.T., the Church is presented as the image or material component of a symbol, of which the risen Christ is the transcendent reality; and, moreover, when it is recognized that the individual disciples are presented as the imagery of that symbol, and thus subject to the conditions governing the function of images and imagery; the dilemma with which theology is faced disappears. For it is no longer necessary to conclude that the N.T. is *either* speaking literally, *or* using mere metaphors. On the contrary, the truth can be recognized that *the N.T. presents the Church as the symbolic image of the risen Christ because there are no other terms in which the experienced reality of the new life, known by the new creation as the gift of grace, is expressible. And it is precisely the existence and possibility of this new life which constitutes the gospel.*

An attempt to substantiate this can be made only on the grounds that it is implicit in everything that the N.T. says of the Church that Christ has effected a reconciliation between God and man, and has brought them together into a union which is similar in kind to the union of a transcendence and an image in a symbol: that is to say, a union the nature of which can be understood as that of a symbolic union. Thus, far from depending for its justification upon the existence of roots in the O.T. the attribution to the Church of a symbolic nature is defensible on the grounds that the reverse is true: namely, that it is precisely this symbolic unity of God and the Church which differentiates the New Israel from the Old; and, indeed, that it was the possibility of this radically new unity that made the good news of the gospel both so good and so new that Paul could say, "The old has passed away, behold, the new has come." The gospel *is* the proclamation to the world that, where

man and God were separated, now they can be united in Christ.

The familiar images — the body, the bride, the temple — support this suggestion; for, while they cause manifest and admitted difficulties to both those who wish to consider them as descriptive of ontological reality and those who wish to regard them as mere metaphors, they are very accurate and precise descriptions of a state of symbolic union between a material and a transcendent component. But over and above these images, it is in the latent implications of the N.T. that the greatest justification of this contention is to be found. For it is implicit in all the N.T. says of Christian living that it is life as a symbol. That is to say, it is implicit in the N.T. doctrine of 'life' that it is lived at that 'point' where material and transcendent reality meet: that point where the visible serves only to draw attention to the invisible. The function of the visible, material component of the symbol — the material man — is to diminish, to wither, to become so self-effacing that he does not absorb the attention which he should pass to the transcendent component; and this, as has been seen, is always the function of an image. The individual disciples are exhorted to do this, when they are told to "let their light so shine before men" that they may see their good works and glorify, not the disciples themselves — the material images — but their transcendent and invisible Father who is in heaven.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the corporate function of the Church is "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God . . . that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known".<sup>2</sup> The function of a minister (*διάκονος*) in the Church is "to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest".<sup>3</sup> The nature of "this mystery . . . is Christ in you";<sup>4</sup> that is to say, Christ in the disciples; and it is made known, not only in the word of the preaching, but in the sufferings and in the flesh of the

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 5:16.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 3:9 f.

<sup>3</sup> Col. 1:25 f.

<sup>4</sup> Col. 1:27.

minister.<sup>1</sup> For the credentials of a true apostle — the characteristics which distinguish him from a false one — are not only the words he speaks, but the things he suffers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the self-effacing role of the image is such that the disciples must not rely upon any excellence or power of their own, for this would be to draw attention to themselves, but upon the power of God.<sup>3</sup> So God makes use of that which is "low and despised in the world, even the things that are not", that through their self-effacement it may be unmistakable that "he is the source of your life in Christ Jesus".<sup>4</sup> So, as might be expected, "God opposes the proud, and gives grace to the humble",<sup>5</sup> because it is through the "weakness" of the image, shorn of all "plausible words of wisdom" and human power, that demonstration is made of the transcendent Spirit, wisdom, and power of God.<sup>6</sup> For God's power is made perfect in and through the weakness of the image which manifests it to the world.<sup>7</sup> So the function of the Church in the world is to be the image, and that of the disciples to be the imagery, of Christ in order to show forth to the world "the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God".<sup>8</sup> And this symbolic Church is a new phenomenon in the world.

But a symbolic image always faces two ways: outward in self-effacing mediation of its transcendent component to those with eyes to see, and inward in self-effacing conformity to that transcendent component. In the case of artistic symbols, the imagery of any individual work, once completed, is static; and so, in this respect, it provides a very imperfect analogy with the developing, growing, or diminishing imagery of the living members of the body of Christ, who may either "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ",<sup>9</sup> or may "turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirit".<sup>10</sup> There is,

<sup>1</sup> Col. 1:24.<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 11:21 ff.; cf. 2 Cor. 1:5.<sup>3</sup> Phil. 3:9 f.<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 1:28 ff.<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. 5:5.<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 2:1 ff.<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 12:9 f.; cf. 2 Cor. 6:4; 11:30; Rom. 5:3.<sup>8</sup> Eph. 3:8 f.<sup>9</sup> Eph. 4:15.<sup>10</sup> Gal. 4:9.

however, a better analogy with the life's work of an artist: with his completed *œuvre*. For, to its author, an individual work of art is always a stage in a progress rather than an end in itself, and only over his whole development can his task be discharged or his achievement be measured. On the one hand, many promising young painters, whose early works are the lively, if immature, images of ideas, gradually devolve into *pasticheurs* as their ideas evaporate, or as technical considerations and preoccupations obscure, and eventually replace, them as ends in themselves. While, on the other hand, the greatness of a Rembrandt, a Cézanne, or a Beethoven cannot be fully appreciated until the whole sweep of his life's work is seen, and especially in its culmination. These three men, in particular, worked with an astonishing simplicity, profundity, and economy in their last phases which are almost nakedly transcendental. Thus the history of an artist's development is the history of the progressive conformation of his imagery to the transcendent ideas which must be expressed by, through, and in it. In so far as his imagery becomes increasingly subservient to the revealed ideas, his work will grow in stature, and significance; but, in so far as his attention is diverted into, and absorbed by, his imagery so that it dominates and obscures the ideas, his work will become meaningless and dead.

This is not very different from a Christian life, "for those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."<sup>1</sup> So Paul could tell the Corinthians that, "when I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified";<sup>2</sup> and to the Galatians he could say that he was "crucified with Christ", and yet he lived, and yet no longer he but Christ lived in him.<sup>3</sup> He reminded them

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:5 f.; cf. Col. 3:2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 2:1 f.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. 2:20.

that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires",<sup>1</sup> and that "our old self was crucified with him".<sup>2</sup> So they must consider themselves dead to sin — that is to say, dead to self with all its assertions — and alive to God in Christ Jesus,<sup>3</sup> because "we are not sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God".<sup>4</sup> There could scarcely be a better definition of the proper function of a symbolic image in its transcendent-facing aspect and in its subservience and conformity to that transcendence.

However, it is, of course, the Church — not a single member — which forms the image of the risen Christ, "for the body does not consist of one member but of many".<sup>5</sup> "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the individual members are not images, in themselves, but imagery of the one image; and that which gives them unity and cohesion is the transcendent component of the one symbol. This is most clearly expressed in the analogy of the "household of God", where it is expressly said that the unity of all is from Christ, "the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together".<sup>7</sup> And, once again, the analogy with artistic symbols is very close. For the imagery of a piece of music, for example, consists of the individual notes, phrases, themes, and movements of which it is composed. Each has its place and function, and each makes a contribution to the whole; but only in so far as each is a part of the whole is it of value. For no one note has any significance except in its relationship to all the other notes, and no one note has any greater importance than any of the others. It cannot be said that the first or the last note, the loudest chord, or the most insistent and recurrent theme, in itself, can claim to be any more necessary than any other note, chord, or theme. Admittedly, some passages are more prominent than others; but the omission of the least prominent passage as being

<sup>1</sup> Gal. 5:24.<sup>2</sup> Rom. 6:6.<sup>3</sup> Rom. 6:11.<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 3:5.<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 12:14.<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 12:27.<sup>7</sup> Eph. 2:20 f.

hardly worth playing would be unthinkable since, by its omission, the whole work would be impoverished, if not completely ruined. Moreover, it is in the subservience of the parts — the imagery — to the whole transcendence which it is their function to mediate to the listener that their unity and their value lie. A single note, played out of context or by itself, is meaningless: a mere noise and, if prolonged, possibly a painful one. But the same note, played in the context of a string quartet, can play a vital part in pointing beyond itself to something profound and splendid. In just the same way, in the Church "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."<sup>1</sup> Wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, and the rest, "all these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body."<sup>2</sup> No one member, not even "those parts of the body which we think less honourable",<sup>3</sup> is less or more important than any other member; for "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together".<sup>4</sup>

So there seems to be a valid analogy between the presentation in the N.T. of the new life of the Church and works of art. But this is not the end of the matter; for, if there is an analogy between the 'life' of genuine works of art — living symbols — and the new life of the Church, the condition of sinners is also analogous to *pastiche*. If the life of the new creation be new, simply because it is a life of symbolic union with God, made possible by Christ — that is to say, a coming together of material men with God by way of the risen Christ — the old life that has passed away was an a-symbolic

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 12:4 f.    <sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 12:11 ff.    <sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 12:23.    <sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 12:26.

life of separation from God because man enthroned himself in God's place: because he treated as ultimate in itself the material image which should have pointed beyond itself to God, and derived its significance from him. As has been said already, man's self-assertive rebellion leads, according to the biblical doctrine of sin, not to self-fulfilment and the realization of his deepest desires, but to bondage to desire, frustration, anxiety, and death.<sup>1</sup> The man who said that "there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the ways of death",<sup>2</sup> summed up the gist of the O.T. doctrine of sin, as Paul sums it up for the N.T. when he tells the Romans that "the wages of sin is death".<sup>3</sup> But, in the N.T., the word death (*θάνατος*) is not used, as we use it, to refer exclusively to physical death. Men may be 'alive', in the biological sense, and yet, for the N.T., "dead through the trespasses and sins" which they have committed.<sup>4</sup> In fact, men before Christ or knowledge of Christ are said to be perishing<sup>5</sup> or dead<sup>6</sup> before they die physically. For their life is a spurious thing, not worthy to be called life at all.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, true life (*ζωὴ αἰώνιος*: eternal life) is not fallen man's possession by biological right, but a gift of God to him through Christ;<sup>8</sup> and this true life is not ultimately jeopardized by physical death. Consequently, the Johannine Christ can say that "he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life".<sup>9</sup> So, for the N.T., both death and life are states of being, possibilities or kinds of existence, partly at least independent of physical death as we think of it, and partly experienced in what we should call 'this life'. Also, for the N.T., death is the result of sin; and sin is the act of living as though the self were ultimate: that is to say, death is the result of the idolatrous enthronement of the material man

<sup>1</sup> *Vide supra*, pp. 77 f.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 16:25 mg.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 6:23.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 2:1.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 1:18.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 6:13.

<sup>7</sup> Jn. 6:53.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 6:23; cf. Jn. 6:27 ff.; 11:25; 20:31.

<sup>9</sup> Jn. 5:24. For a study of the biblical concept of 'Life', *vide* F. J. A.

Hort, *Hulsean Lectures*, pp. 98 ff. and 189 ff.

as being self-sufficient and an end in himself. Life, on the contrary, is a gift of God to those who repent; and repentance implies that a man's mind, attention, worship, and conduct are re-directed by Christ, so that, where they were egocentric, they become theocentric.<sup>1</sup>

There is, evidently, therefore, a fairly close analogy between the N.T. use of the word, 'death', and the use of the word, 'dead', to describe the nature of certain spurious works of art; and the analogy is not dependent upon a coincidence of verbal usage only. In both the case of the sinner and that of the work of *pastiche*, a material thing, which should point beyond itself to a transcendent reality, is stultified by an internal concentration upon itself which renders it valueless and lifeless. In this process of misplaced concentration and self-absorption, the purpose of its existence is completely frustrated; and so it can be said to be already dead. Its continued existence is an anachronism, and its final material destruction will be no surprise; for it has already forfeited any claim to life that it might otherwise have had, since such a claim can be made for it only on behalf of the source of its life, which is always something transcending itself. It is significant that, as in the arts the end-product of humanism proved to be the death of the school to which it gave rise in a morass of *pastiche*, so humanist society has eventually become secular society in which man, after centuries of self-enthronement, finds himself in a state of unprecedented neurosis, anxiety, frustration, despair, and ontological agnosticism. By biblical criteria it may be said that, because humanism systematically elevated the sin of self-idolatry or man-worship to the status of an avowed principle, humanist society is now receiving its wages in the destruction of the image which it erected in God's place.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, *μετανοέω* and *μετάνοια*. Of the verb, it is said that it signifies "change of mind . . . Its meaning deepens with Christianity, and in the N.T. it is more than 'repent', and indicates a complete change of attitude, spiritual and moral, towards God." Of the noun, it is said that it signifies "a coming to one's senses, resulting in a change of conduct."

This is not all, however, for no account of the biblical doctrine of life and death would be complete without reference to the idea that life "in Christ", the life of the "new creation", is an eschatological phenomenon. "The time cometh, and now is . . ." runs the Johannine formula of fulfilment. The death and resurrection of Christ inaugurates the time of the end, and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost is an eschatological sign. Since Schweitzer forced biblical eschatology upon the attention of theologians, such phrases as 'realized eschatology' and 'futurist eschatology' have become extremely familiar, even if they have not become equally intelligible. However, one thing seems to be agreed by the protagonists of the rival camps; namely, that an eschatological event is one which, while rooted in time, in some sense also transcends it. For example, Bultmann describes the Cross as "an eschatological event in and beyond time, for as far as its meaning — that is to say, its meaning for faith — is concerned, it is an ever-present reality".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Kümmel, who refuses to discard all futurist expectation as 'mere mythology', sees the past event of Jesus as indissolubly connected, not so much with the present, as with the future. "The eschatological event he (i.e. Jesus) proclaims does not lie in the end of the world as such, but in the fact that the approaching eschatological consummation will allow the kingdom of *that* God to become a reality who has already in the present allowed his redemptive purpose to be realized in Jesus";<sup>2</sup> so "for the believer the question is not whether he will accept the correctness of an apocalyptic prediction or of an interpretation referring to the present of that which relates to the beyond, but whether he will respond to the divine mission of *that* Jesus who could promise the reign of God, because it was already being fulfilled in him. The Christian can assent to this question with complete confidence only because he knows of God's action in raising the one who was crucified

<sup>1</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, p. 154 (S.C.M. Press, 1957).

and in founding his Church through the gift of the Spirit which lies beyond the earthly activity of Jesus. But the Christian knows also that the possibility of such faith is bound up with the reality of the Jesus in whom God brought his salvation to fulfilment in history and through whom God authoritatively promised his approaching consummation of history."<sup>1</sup>

These are two particularly clear statements of the rival interpretations; but, if one is to be candid, it must be admitted that, usually, theological writing on the subject of eschatology is not most remarkable for its comprehensibility. Indeed, it seems almost impossible for theologians to write about it without either grossly over-simplifying matters by a convenient, if cavalier, treatment of the biblical material, or, if they do not maltreat their sources, lapsing into an obscurity which is virtually impenetrable. The trouble seems to be that analogical thinking, the indispensable tool of theology, appears at first sight to be inapplicable to eschatology, just because there is no valid analogy between eschatological phenomena and other things within the field of human knowledge and experience. So theologians are forced to use words in a manner which is exotic to their origins and peculiar to this one subject, thus rendering the words themselves apparently meaningless and self-contradictory. For instance, when Fuchs refers to "the nearness and remoteness of a 'time' which no longer 'has any extension' . . . This time has absolutely nothing to do with circular or linear",<sup>2</sup> it is difficult to discover any meaning at all in his use of the word, 'time', so remote is it from its normal connotation. Similarly, when Wendland tells us that we must "start from the Reign as concerned with the end of time, but must grasp equally the inner polarity of the idea of the Reign as being concerned with the end of time

<sup>1</sup> W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, *ad fin.* In both these quotations, the italics are Professor Kümmel's.

<sup>2</sup> E. Fuchs, *Christus das Ende der Geschichte*, *Evangelische Theologie* 8, 1948/49, p. 450, n. 10; quoted and trans. in Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 144, n. 5.

and beyond time and therefore must find the presence of the Reign grounded in fact and in principle",<sup>1</sup> we are not greatly enlightened. In contrast to these exceedingly obscure statements, Dodd achieves pellucid intelligibility, but only at the expense of seeming to reduce N.T. eschatology from the rank of "actuality" to that of "fantasy". "Since no man has ever experienced the end of history," he writes, "it can be expressed only in the form of fantasy . . . We are dealing with symbol and not with actuality . . . The time scale is irrelevant to that which has never received embodiment in the forms of time and space, and therefore has no existence in the temporal order."<sup>2</sup> Whatever Dodd may mean, this hardly seems satisfactory as an account of the ideas of the N.T. writers, whose eschatological convictions, whatever else they may have been, were sufficiently 'real' and 'actual' to those who believed them to govern and condition both their lives and deaths.

However, this quotation from Dodd may provide a clue to the essential nature of the difficulty in which contemporary theology finds itself when it is confronted with biblical eschatology. For, once again, it is at least possible that it is grappling with what appears to be an insoluble problem, simply because it assumes on *a priori* grounds that the nature of reality cannot be accorded to the symbolic. Certainly, as has been said already, the works of contemporary theologians make it abundantly clear that, when the eschatological ideas of the N.T. are regarded as being necessarily, either historically and materially real, or merely metaphorical and fantastic, either intelligibility or consistency must be sacrificed in order to 'explain' them. Dodd, certainly, appears to assume that "actuality" and "symbol" are irreconcilably opposed and that symbolism must be equated with "fantasy". But, if the N.T. be regarded with no *a priori* bias

<sup>1</sup> H.-D. Wendland, *Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus*, p. 51, 1931; quoted and trans. in Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 144, n. 5.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, Appendix, pp. 202 f. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1936).

and in the absence of contemporary assumptions, nothing could be plainer than the fact that its writers consistently referred to things which they evidently regarded as real in symbolic terms. It would seem wise, therefore, to suspend the operation of modern epistemological assumptions in this respect.

When this is done, one thing is obvious. It is no longer true to say that no analogy is possible between the eschatological events of the N.T. and any other objects of human knowledge or subjects of human experience. For, if an eschatological event be described as one which, while rooted in time, transcends it — an event “in and beyond time”, and thus “an ever-present reality” — then there is a close affinity between an eschatological event and a work of art. That this is so may be seen, if one takes as an example a portrait by Rembrandt: for instance, a portrait of Titus. Such a portrait is undoubtedly something which has its origin and root in a real, historical event: namely, the existence of a material historical boy at a particular time.<sup>1</sup> Thus Rembrandt's portrait of his son is rooted in the particular, the temporal, the material, and the historical. But in so far as the portrait is more than a mere record of a material event — in so far, in fact, as it is a work of art and means something — the significance of the event extends beyond the time of its origin and the limitations of its material eventuality. Indeed, one might almost re-apply Bultmann's *dictum* and say of it that, “as far as its meaning . . . is concerned, it is an ever-present reality”. For, transcending the material event in which the work had its origin — i.e. Titus at a moment of time — something profoundly valuable, which is significant of the nature of that historical event, is made present to the contemporary observer. In the case of a *Titus* by Rembrandt, probably the ‘something’ which is made present will have to do with the mystery and tragedy of man and with the divine compassion for him; and this

<sup>1</sup> The event in which a work of art has its origin is much more complex than this, of course.

'something' will be more or less relevant to the contemporary observer's understanding of his own existence according to the greatness of the work. If the work were wholly irrelevant to the observer's existence, either he would be blind, or it would not be a work of art but a 'dead' thing: a work of meaningless *pastiche*. That the life of a work of art extends beyond the event of its origin is obvious enough; for, if it were otherwise, it would follow that a work of art would cease to have any value, significance, or reason for its existence as soon as the event, which originally gave rise to it, was past. Self-evidently, this is the very reverse of the truth; for it is in its 'eternalization' of the event as something of unchanging and persistent relevance to generations of men that the greatness of a great work of art is to be found. Similarly, it is this that differentiates it from a work that is ephemeral and thus of little or no value. It may be claimed, therefore, that there is at least this analogy between a work of art and an eschatological event: namely, that each is rooted in a particular event at a moment of time, and yet each transcends it.

At this point, however, it may be objected that, even if a reasonable case has been made out for the existence of an analogy between works of art and the eschatological events of the N.T. when they are interpreted by the school of realized eschatology, nothing has been said that helps to explain the futurist ideas of the N.T. writers. In other words, it may be argued that, even if a work of art can be said to make present and relevant a past event, it cannot concern the future. But to object to the analogy with the arts on these grounds may be precisely to miss the lesson which that analogy, if valid, should teach us concerning biblical eschatology. For might it not be that to press the objection would be to relapse into just the way of thinking about eschatology that is at the root of all the contemporary trouble? That is to say, might it not be to relapse into the attitude of mind which assumes that the 'true' and the 'real' are exclusively equivalent to the material, the factual, the

historical, and the like? Whereas, if there be indeed a valid analogy between works of art and eschatological events, then perhaps the latter should be regarded, in the true sense, as symbolic events: events in which the material and the transcendent come together into an indivisible unity. In this case, one should expect to find that each event, when analysed, would prove to consist of both a material and a transcendent component. Then emphasis upon the realized aspect of an eschatological event would be emphasis upon the undeniable reality of its material component; while emphasis upon its futurist aspect would betray an acute consciousness of the fact that, in a truly symbolic event, something must always transcend that which is realized; or, to put this another way, it would betray a realization of the truth that a transcendent component *must always transcend*. When it is remembered that it is this transcendent component — or futurist aspect — of biblical eschatology which normally gives contemporary theology so much trouble, it seems at least possible that this trouble has arisen just because theologians, basing their ideas on contemporary epistemological assumptions, have sought for the assurance of future, historical eventuality in that aspect of an eschatological event which, if it be symbolic, must by its very nature transcend history and eventuality. Thus, the lesson of the arts may well be simply that an eschatological event, just because it is eschatological, will always contain within itself a unity of the material and the transcendent, the temporal and the trans-temporal, the realized and the futurist.

If there be any truth in the principal contention of this chapter that the Church is presented in the N.T. as, in essence, a symbol, it should follow that its health and sickness, life and death, are likely to be subject to conditions similar to those which govern the well-being of the arts; and, in fact, this seems to be the case. For many of the things which have been said about the arts can be re-applied to the Church, both in its corporate nature and in its

individual membership, with some cogency. It will be recalled that an attempt was made to show that the *sine qua non* for artistic creation, as for appreciation, is the right orientation of the attention. So long as the mind of the artist is bent upon the transcendent idea, which it is his purpose somehow to embody and express in his work, all will be well. This process of creation is experienced primarily as a passive act of reception: something is revealed to the artist; and only secondarily is it an active affair of forging means of expression, even though, in practice, these two aspects of the creative act are so closely welded together as virtually to form one activity. Sickness attacks this creative process when and if the artist allows his attention to become taken up with his means and methods: when he becomes engrossed in rules of thumb, laws of composition, and the rest. For then the resulting work will be *pastiche*, drawing the attention of the observer to nothing beyond the image, which will be a spurious thing, lifeless and meaningless.

As applied to the Church, much the same can be said. If the Church is to be the Church at all, the *sine qua non* of its existence is the right orientation of its attention, motive, and inspiration. So long as the mind and will of the Church are bent upon God and upon the necessity of meditating a knowledge of him — his love, his peace, his mercy, his demands — to the world, all will be well. Its life will be vigorous even as its members die. Its richness, strength, and profundity will be unsearchable even when its material image is apparently poverty stricken, weak, and utterly simple; and the miracle of its peace and its joy will elude every attempt at analysis. In other words, so long as the inner life of the Church is governed by this one consideration — the primacy of God — however disastrous may be the secular circumstances which surround it in the world, it will *be* the Church, pointing beyond itself to God who is both implicit in its life and yet eternally transcending that life. Moreover, this inner and essential life of the Church is experienced primarily as a gift. The Church's part is, first

and foremost, passive and receptive and only secondarily active. For just as Cézanne said that "nature reveals herself to me in very complex forms, and the progress needed is incessant",<sup>1</sup> so Paul said, "I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended."<sup>2</sup> But, as in the arts, so in Christian experience, in practice it is impossible to disentangle the passive and the active aspects of a Christian life; for it is in the active transformation of the being and the will by prayer, by study, by worship, and by work that the Christian receives, explores, and knows the grace of God which he experiences as a gift, and which he knows to be ultimately the agency of his transformation. Thus, as he is progressively conformed to the will of God, so more and more will he mediate the knowledge of God to others, behaving as a good symbol should, in self-effacement that he may face two ways: towards God and towards the world, but never inwards towards himself.

But in the Church, as in the arts, this ideal state of affairs does not always continue. Sickness attacks the Church with as much virulence as it attacks the arts, when the attention of the Church is diverted to itself or to its means and methods as ends in themselves; and, historically, this has happened only too often. The pattern of events is depressingly familiar. In a dead period, a movement of revival arises. Whether its initiators call themselves Franciscans, Lutherans, Wesleyans, or Tractarians does not matter; nor does it matter that their methods may be widely different, some emphasizing poverty, some preaching, some worship; for all will succeed so long as their aim is conformity with the will of God. And invariably the driving force behind all such movements, if they be genuine, is the same: a passionate desire to return to the fountain of all grace, God himself. As a result, for a time the grace of God flows through such movements with a vigour that cannot be mistaken, and there is a flowering of godliness and life. But, in time, the very success of the movement attracts more and more people into

<sup>1</sup> *Vide supra*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 3:12 R.V.

its ranks; and while some of the new members come to it out of love for God, others come out of love for the movement. As the latter increase in numbers, the movement becomes fashionable. People scramble to join it under the mistaken impression that all that is needful to bring in the kingdom of God overnight is for everyone to become members of the movement. By this time, the aim is not to convert everyone to the service of God, but to convert them to the opinions of the movement. Thus it is not God but the party methods which are being universally acclaimed and sought after as a panacea. "Let us all concentrate on evangelical preaching," or "Let us all wear vestments and revive the splendours of the liturgy," or "Let us all stand round the altar, while the Priest faces westward." Such familiar war cries, and others like them, have gone up from the ranks of revival. Inevitably, however, by the time that the party has reached this stage with its methods regarded as the pass-keys to the doors of the kingdom, the movement itself will be sick, dying, or dead. In fact, it will be a *pastiche* movement: a spurious thing, presenting a false image to the world; a part of the Church of God which, but for the life still flowing through some of its genuinely God-directed members, will be perilously similar to the Pharisaic Church of Christ's day which was rich in every outward ecclesiastical form but no longer evinced any inner life.

It was said in a previous passage in this book that the gradual decline of a school of art or manner of painting has often been inversely proportional to the gradual rise of a belief that, at last, an 'objective' understanding of its values has been reached; for, as both artists and critics have become more and more sure that they understand the rules governing the perfection of a manner, so confrontation with and apprehension of any transcendence has been progressively replaced by creation and judgement according to maxim, law, or rule of thumb. To make too detailed an exploration of the pertinence of these remarks to the condition of the Church at various times in its history — for instance, to

the condition of the late mediaeval Church — would be to elaborate the obvious. But perhaps it is permissible to point to one less celebrated period of Church history in illustration of its relevance. Nicolas Zernov has written of the Church in Russia in the sixteenth century that the dominant body in it at that time, the Josephians, had sacrificed its gift of freedom. They did this "in order to impose upon the nation uniformity in worship and religious thought . . . They declared the Russian Church to be the final achievement of Christianity. The ideal advocated by them was the careful observance of the rules of the Church, especially in worship and fasting. They were convinced that no further advance of Church life was either necessary or possible. The remaining generations of Christians had only one task left to them — the faithful reproduction of the type of Church life created by their fathers." Thus, these people believed that perfection had been reached at last, and could be perpetuated by a well understood formula. Dr Zernov has pointed to the immediate consequences of this belief. "The great vision of Russia's universal mission became the source of an extreme national pride, which isolated the country from the rest of the world. Russia reached a state of complete self-satisfaction which paralysed the vitality of the young nation and made it stagnant, immoveable and helpless."<sup>1</sup> As to the long term consequences, "Russian life had lost its salt; it became putrified and stagnant, and there was no other alternative left to the people except subserviency or revolt."<sup>2</sup> European art, when it was convinced that it had achieved a similar understanding of the rules governing its perfection, was faced with a like alternative: subservience to an idolized (and therefore dead and putrified) tradition or revolt against it; and the artists, too, chose revolt.

The fact is that, as any school of art can enthrone its own style as an end in itself and thus transform it into *pastiche*, so any ecclesiastical body can idolize itself or any of its

<sup>1</sup> N. Zernov, *Moscow, the Third Rome*, pp. 52-3 (S.P.C.K., 1937).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

doctrinal, devotional, or intellectual forms with disastrous consequences. When this occurs, there is a lethal transformation of images into idols, and forms into formulae, which transforms the Church into a *pastiche* Church. This is not a matter of mere theory. History, at various times and in various ways, has fully demonstrated the practical possibility of such a sequence of events. Thus, the world has seen the enthronement of an ecclesiastical body on the pretext of conformity and unity lead to disagreement and schism, the enthronement of the word of God to fundamentalism, the enthronement of scholastic ingenuity to obscurantism and intellectual inanition, the enthronement of prayer to pietism, and the enthronement of active charity to sentimental philanthropy. The moral is that there is only one legitimate occupant of the Church's throne, God, as there is only one true image of him, Christ; "for in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell".

## IMAGE AND REALITY

So far, an attempt has been made to show that the N.T. presents both Christ and the Church as symbols: the former as the image of God, the latter as the continuing image of Christ. A stage in the argument has been reached when the question of the relationship between image and reality must be re-opened in greater detail. For it will be urged that, while it is all very well to recognize that the writers of the N.T. used symbolic language in their attempt to give the world the truth about God's action in Christ, our own age will be no more content than the patristic age to let matters rest there; for it will wish to know how true such a presentation is to what it would doubtless call 'the facts'. Christ may be presented as a symbol, it will be said, and so may the Church, but can such presentations be true?

A certain amount has been said already concerning this problem, and before proceeding further it is worth remembering that it is very similar to the problems which engaged the minds of the Greek fathers, and which resulted in the credal definitions of the early Church. But the consequent Trinitarian and Christological dogmas, together with the N.T. upon which they were based, form the basis of the traditional language of the Church, the breakdown of which, as a vehicle of communication in our own age, has been the subject of this inquiry. The process of this breakdown at the time of the Renaissance has been discussed, but not its root cause. Yet, since secular materialism is a post-Christian phenomenon, having attained its greatest proportions in the civilization which has supplanted that of Western Christendom, it is reasonable to look for its seed in Christianity. Therefore, before proceeding to ask the fundamental questions about the nature of God and Christ once again, a

further attempt must be made to identify the root cause of the contemporary breakdown of the theological language which has traditionally expressed Christian dogma; and this attempt may now be made in the light of what has been said concerning the conditions which govern the health and disease of symbolic communication. It would, of course, be extremely rash to assume that the whole transformation of Western society has been due to a single cause; and since this essay is, in any case, concerned solely with symbolism, its field must be limited to inquiring what contribution, if any, the use or misuse of symbols may have made to the final result.

Here, a return must be made to the subject of symbol and paradox. It has been remarked often enough that the Hebrew mind found nothing strange in paradox and that the N.T. is filled with paradoxical statements. For instance, the sacramental teaching of Jn. 6 is a case in point<sup>1</sup> with its juxtaposition of the apparently incompatible statements, "Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you,"<sup>2</sup> and, "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Paul's insistence that Christians are "dead to sin", delivered from its power, immediately followed, as it is, by an exhortation not to sin,<sup>4</sup> is an apparent paradox, which seems to give Paul no difficulty. But the bent of the Greek mind was rational and analytical. It analysed paradoxical statements into their component and apparently contradictory parts. It was extremely careful to keep these parts in balance, and it is no part of the intention of this book to criticize or denigrate the Greek and Latin fathers who were responsible for the doctrine of the great decisive credal definitions. In the climate of rational and intellectual opinion which prevailed in their day, what they did was inescapable and necessary, and they can no more be blamed

<sup>1</sup> Whether this be an addition to the gospel, as some suggest, or not is irrelevant, for it is certainly N.T. teaching.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. 6:53.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. 6:63.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 6:11 ff.; cf. 1 Pet. 2:24 ff.

for the long term consequences of their work than one can blame Giotto for the more nauseating Christmas cards of the twentieth century. But if the main thesis of this book be correct, it would be a mistake to say that the N.T. is filled simply with paradox. The Greek fathers certainly found it so; but it would be more correct to say that, to its Hebrew writers, it was filled, not so much with paradox, as with symbolic statements about experience; and, as has been said already, the two things — symbol and paradox — are subtly but decisively different.

To recapitulate: for the sake of definition one can only say that a symbol is a thing descriptive of an event in which two 'things' come together as one. Such events were, for the writers of the N.T., typical of the new age, and knowledge of them constituted the characteristic experience of the new creature who was, himself, a coming together in symbolic union of the Spirit of God and the flesh of man. In other words, for the N.T. a symbol was not merely the sum of two old things, but rather one newly created thing. Indeed, the essence of the biblical symbols is precisely their internal unity, so that there are not 'two things' in them at all, but one united, indivisible, symbolic whole; and this is true of all genuine symbols. Once again, it is easier to see this in the arts than in theology, simply because the latter is soaked in analytical method. For, as has been said, it is obvious that a picture cannot be dissected into a transcendent part, on the one hand, and the paint and canvas, on the other. There are not two 'things' which can be isolated, one material and the other immaterial, in the canvas; on the contrary, it is one symbol, and the experience of the transcendent truth is to be had only by revelation in and through the canvas and paint and in no other way.

A paradox, on the other hand, is that which results from the analysis of a symbol; and after analysis it ceases to be a symbol, just as surely as water ceases to be water when it is decomposed by electrolysis into hydrogen and oxygen. But it is inevitable that the analysis of a symbol should

produce paradox, for the nature and purpose of analysis is to identify the components of the thing analysed, and since the nature of a symbol can be defined only as the coming together of a material object with a transcendence, with which the object is not 'naturally' compatible, analysis can only point to, and hold apart, two incompatibles, so producing paradox. Thus it inevitably destroys a symbol as a symbol, because the essential thing about a symbol is not its component structure but its unity; and this is lost in the process of analysis. Thereafter to base theology upon a simultaneous affirmation of incompatibles is not equivalent to basing it upon a symbol. Instead, it is to base it upon a foundation which is potentially dualist, however strongly this unwelcome conclusion be denied, and however ingeniously it may be verbally disguised; for, if the foundation consists of the balance of *two things*, it is evident that it does not consist of one. So the symbolic union of the 'two natures' in Christ, for instance, which it was the precise purpose of Chalcedonian dogma to preserve, was actually jeopardized if not lost at Chalcedon; for it was preserved only as a unity of two things, and thus attention was inevitably diverted to the potential duality of Christ.

Once the essential unity of the symbols in the N.T. had been thus transformed by intellectual analysis into the potential dualism of paradox, the main task of theology became that of preventing this potential dualism from becoming actual. Trinitarian, Christological, and sacramental dogmas were elaborate attempts to hold together the incompatible components of paradox in such a way as to preserve the truth of both sides. But brilliantly successful as they were for a very long time, it was intrinsically probable that they would fail in the long run. The reason for this may perhaps be seen most clearly in western sacramental theology which was typical. As is well known, the metabolist doctrine of the sacrament which issued in the doctrine of Transubstantiation was an attempt to explain the co-inherence of Christ and a piece of bread. As is equally well

known, the manner of this co-inherence was explained in the West by saying that a verbal abstraction, substance, changed, while another verbal abstraction, accidents, did not do so. That the solution was, in its way, brilliantly ingenious should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the problem was wrongly framed. For, to return to painting again, anyone who tried to determine where the canvas and paint of a picture ended and where the truth and the beauty began would be accused immediately of attempting the impossible: indeed, almost of attempting the absurd. But so enmeshed was theology in the toils of analytical method that Christendom and the Church were rent in pieces by arguments over problems of this kind. Admittedly, during the centuries which followed the patristic period, theology was able to preserve a dazzling, if precarious, balance on a tight-rope of verbal *finesse* and esoteric intellectualism, while popular practice continued to be what it must always be: a life of knowing God, rather than knowing about him. However, eventually, the acrobatics of the theologians ended in disaster. This occurred at the Renaissance, when Western theology came down heavily on the side of the humanity of Christ, the material Church, the matter of the sacraments, and the like; in fact, upon the side of the images. For the world, the result of this disaster was the gradual metamorphosis of Christendom into our own materialist society *via* Christian humanism and its heir, humanism *simpliciter*; while, for theology, the result was an overt rupture at the time of the Reformation between the theological protagonists of the two sides of the patristic paradox: the sacramentalists and the transcendentalists. Thus, in the end, it was not merely the symbols of the N.T. which were broken up into their incompatible parts by analysis, but Christendom and the Church too.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that an intellectual approach to the faith is wrong. On the contrary, it is essential in every age. Disaster will ensue only when the intellectual methods used and their particular results are

enthroned as ends in themselves. Then assent to the correctness of the definitions will come to be regarded as more important than a knowledge of the thing which is being defined; and the definitions, instead of leading men's minds to the living God, will be set up in his place. The Western predilection, amounting almost to an obsession in post-Renaissance times — and especially at the time of the Reformation, when it was common to both camps — for making subscription to a series of articles of belief the test of a man's faith is evidence of the prevalence of this kind of idolatry in the West during this time. It seems probable that this was, at least partly, a result of the transformation of Christian symbolism into paradox. For, once paradoxical propositions had replaced symbolic experience as the basis of Christian knowledge, it was easily forgotten that Christian understanding is to be had only in the living experience of being known by God. Instead, this was replaced by an 'understanding' which was pronounced Christian when a man was prepared to assent to a catalogue of propositions; thus, incidentally but expediently, avoiding the charge of heresy which would have followed a refusal to subscribe to the formula. As a by-product of this new concept of Christian 'understanding', life in Christ — a life of symbolic unity with God — was replaced by the duality of a material life of instruction and discipline in this world in the hope that, eventually, this might lead to a transcendent life in heaven; and knowledge of God, in the biblical sense of participation in the citizenship of heaven here and now, was replaced by an attempt to gain knowledge of him by objective, detached, intellectual observation and contemplation. But, by itself, the latter can never lead to Christian knowledge; though Christian knowledge, gained in participation and received as a gift, may be — and, indeed, should be — deepened and strengthened by *post hoc* ratiocination and contemplation.

To summarize, therefore, it is perhaps not unfair to say that, in so far as the perversion of symbolism played a

part in the decay of the system of Christian belief and communication, the germ of that decay was present in the work of the patristic age. For, albeit unwittingly and perhaps inescapably, the patristic formulators, whose job it was to fit a Greek glove on to a Hebraic hand, resorted to analytical methods of doing this, which introduced into the language expressive of Christian belief a factor which, in the long run, endangered that belief; for the doctrine of the unity of God, the unity of man and God in Christ, the terrestrial-celestial unity of life in Christ, and thus the God-given unity of the Church was expressed in language which ultimately compromised that doctrine. Therefore, if there is to be a renewed attempt in our own age to answer again, in language and concepts intelligible to-day, the fundamental questions which confronted the patristic theologians, the task must be undertaken in the light of an understanding of the nature and function of symbolic language, if the same risk is not to be run all over again. So once again, perhaps the arts may be invoked in aid since, *a fortiori*, they provide guidance in the matter of symbolism.

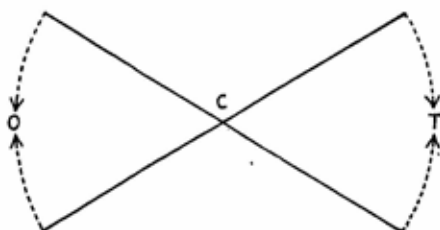
That such a reformulation is necessary will be denied by some, though not, it is to be hoped, by many; but that it is a task of the utmost difficulty, beset with traps for the unwary, will be denied by none. Even so, to plead the danger of the task would be a poor excuse for failing to undertake it. So, in the hope that what follows will be treated with indulgence and forbearance, one possible line of approach to the task of reformulation will be put forward here tentatively and with both the greatest hesitancy and trepidation. For, remembering always that the person and being of God must remain a mystery; and that, therefore, even if a notional model of the 'structure' of God, so to speak, could be entertained, it would bear only the same kind of relationship to the actual being of God as that which, for instance, human righteousness or obedience bears to the righteousness of God or the obedience of Christ; it does seem, once more, that the arts may provide a tentative analogy upon

which to base a reformulation of the great dogmas concerned with the nature of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.

Any attempt to show how this may be so must begin by looking more closely at that essential aspect of a work of art which has been called its transcendent component. So far, in this essay, this aspect of a work of art has been treated as one 'part' of it, the other being the material canvas and paint, lump of stone, or whatever it may be that forms the artefact; and, so far as it goes, this is true. However, it has been stressed throughout that the picture is not two 'things' but one thing; and, indeed, in this respect the words of the *Quicumque vult* may be adapted to say, most fittingly, of a work of art that "although it be transcendent and material, yet it is not two things, but one thing. One; not by conversion of the transcendent into material canvas and paint, but by taking of the material picture into the realm of the transcendental. In fact, one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of existence and being." While it is very difficult to conceive of the Chalcedonian Christ with his "two natures . . . preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence,"<sup>1</sup> simply because the word 'nature' will, inevitably if mistakenly, be interpreted as signifying consciousness, selfhood, or personality, it is not difficult to see that the union of the "two natures" in Christ is akin to that of the two components in a work of art. But this is not the end of the matter by any means; for, on closer examination, the transcendent component of a work of art turns out to be much less simple than has been allowed to appear so far in this essay. For it cannot be regarded merely as being confined to the work of art. Indeed, its very name emphasizes the fact that it transcends the material image in which it is embodied, and through which it is expressed. Discussion of a work of art, regarded as an object, must necessarily treat of its transcendent component only in so far as it is confined to the centre of the

<sup>1</sup> H. Bettenson, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

artistic process: namely, the picture. But, even if it may be necessary, it is an artificial procedure to isolate the work of art in this way, and to regard it as having a significance or value of its own which is independent of the artistic process, at the centre of which it stands. The process is a bigger thing than the picture which stands at the centre of it; for it includes both an observer and the transcendent truth which is mediated to him in, through, and by the picture. It is only when a picture is beheld by someone, and performs its function of mediation, that its significance and value can be recognized. It would be a metaphysician's nightmare to have to decide whether a work of art, which was permanently and irretrievably hidden, had any significance or value, and, if so, wherein it lay. For the object of its existence is to mediate a transcendent truth about the phenomenal world to an observer; and, broadly speaking, its value will be dependent upon the profundity of this truth. So it is chiefly in so far as a work of art forms the centre of this process that it fulfils its function and has value. The diagram below may make clearer the nature of this process.



*Fig. 1.*

T is the transcendent 'object' of the artist's apprehension: that is to say, something transcending the phenomenal world, yet viewed in, through, and beyond a particular material phenomenon; and true of it. C is the canvas, in

which this positive affirmation about T is embodied and expressed. Meanwhile, O is the observer who, confronted with the canvas, is challenged to say, either that the work is 'good' or 'bad': that is to say, that its affirmation about T is valuable or cheap, true or false. It would be misleading to say that the canvas, C, acts as a kind of lens, through which O may view the artist's apprehension of T, as the diagram rather suggests; for, in fact, the canvas does far more than this, standing between the observer and the truth, which it wholly embodies, in a manner which is both *sui generis* and irreplaceable. A lens projects. A canvas embodies, makes clear, and reveals. The observer, of course, may be blind to that which is being revealed to him; but, if he "has eyes to see", his response to the picture will be to say, "It is magnificent"; and the artistic process will be complete. The picture will have revealed to him some truth about, and yet transcending, the phenomenal world. One result of this will be that he will never look at the world in just the same way again, for his eyes will have been opened to a new aspect of reality. Moreover, he himself will be changed by the impact of the picture's revelation. He will be a richer and a fuller person, and he will, as it were, carry away within himself something of the transcendent truth which has been imparted to him. So, if language may be strained beyond its usual bounds, this means that T has a threefold location and life in the artistic process. For it has a validity of its own; it is implicit in C; and it is mediated to O. Yet, surely, there are not three transcendences, but one transcendence.

In some such sense, is it not possible to regard Christ — the total event of Christ — as the perfect work and complete mediator of God, revealing him to all those with eyes to see? If so a slightly different approach from the patristic approach must be followed. The patristic definitions are concerned mostly with the being of God. But the gospel is concerned at least as much with the action of God as with his being; and the problem of Christology may be looked

upon, not so much as an ontological problem, but as a problem concerned primarily with God's action. Then, the nature of the divine process becomes of greater concern than that of the divine being. When the problem is regarded, not ontologically but dynamically, the divine process, in some respects, proves to be not unlike the artistic process. At its simplest, it could be illustrated by a similar diagram.

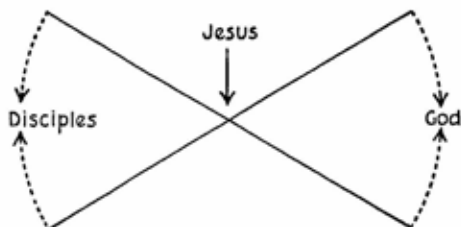


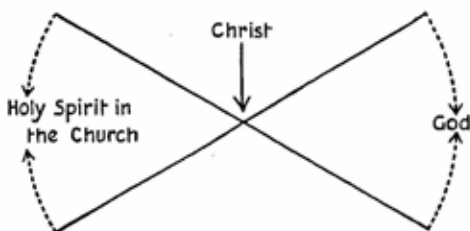
Fig. 2.

But, in fact, this would be misleading, for the disciples did not see the whole truth during the lifetime of Jesus; and the work of God in Christ was completed only by his death. Until after his death, the disciples were astonishingly blind. Thus, the cry of the Johannine Christ, *τετέλεσται*,<sup>1</sup> does not represent a theology peculiar to the fourth gospel. Rather, it is a belief common to the whole N.T. that "it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day",<sup>2</sup> for his work could be completed in no other way. So the divine process reached its fulfilment precisely when the man Jesus died, and the diagram must be re-drawn as it appears in Fig. 3.

Regarded in this way, the total event of Christ takes its place as the centre of the divine process. The eternally transcendent God was wholly implicit and embodied in the event of Christ, through, by, and in whom alone he mediated

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 19:30.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. 24:46 A.V.

*Fig. 3.*

himself to mankind. Men, of course, might be blind, in the perversion of their freedom, to the revelation, and some men called "the master of the house, Beelzebub".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, some men with eyes to see aright responded to the challenge of God's self-revelation in Christ by saying, "My Lord and my God!"<sup>2</sup> Such men never looked at the world in quite the same way again, for they, too, were changed by the impact of what they had been shown. They carried away within themselves something of that which had been imparted to them, so becoming temples of the Holy Ghost.

But, if it were to be left at this point, this would still be inadequate as an account of the divine process. For after the death-resurrection-ascension, who or what is meant by 'Christ'? Who stands at the centre of the diagram? The completion of God's work was simultaneous with the death of Jesus, so that, just at the moment when the work of forging the image of God was completed, the Jesus of history disappears from the realm of visible history. But it is also at this 'moment' that the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, are shown in the finished image the truth of God's completed act of redemption. They know and are redeemed; the Mediator has mediated; the divine process is complete; the disciples are taken up into Christ; man and God are

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 10:25.<sup>2</sup> Jn. 20:28.

separated no longer; the new act of creation is finished, and God rests on the Sabbath from his Good Friday labour of creation; Easter life "in Christ" begins on the first day of the new creation, and the new creatures can begin life as members of the body of Christ, partakers of the divine nature, imagery of the one image. So the diagram must be re-drawn, for the last time, truly to represent this final stage in the divine process when the disciples are taken up into its action and purpose as "sons of God... children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ".<sup>1</sup>

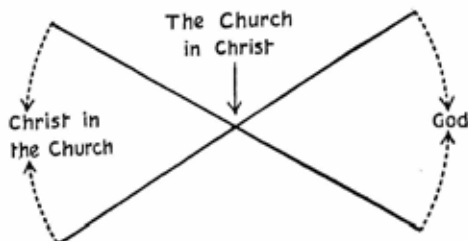


Fig. 4.

For the disciples are heirs in the very true sense that they inherit, as it were, Christ's place and function as his body, the image of God. This is not to denigrate the completeness of Christ's work. On the contrary, it is precisely the inheritance of the disciples that constitutes its crown and completion. Because of the work of God in Christ, from now on the Church may "dwell in him, and he in us"; it is planted in history, yet looped up into heaven: material yet transcendent: imagery of the divinely completed image of God. So, finally, if language may be strained once more beyond its usual bounds, this, too, means that God has a threefold location and life in the divine process. He has an existence of his own, self-determining and complete in himself.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:14 ff.

Secondly, *this* God — *this* transcendent, independently existing God — *this* "God was in Christ", wholly, fully, and freely; and, thirdly, through the mediation of Christ, this same God gives his Spirit to the Church, dwelling in it as his body. Yet, emphatically and plainly, there are not three Gods, but one God with a threefold location and life in the divine process. When a man knows Christ, he knows, not a second 'person' (in any normal sense of that word) of God, but the one eternal God in his redemptive movement out and down to mankind; and, thereafter he will be led, not by a third 'person' of God, but again by the one eternal, transcendent God, active in his divine process.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of gaps and inadequacies in this notional model of the divine action is fully recognized and readily admitted. For instance, at first sight it would appear to confine the Holy Spirit to the Church and to leave out of account such doctrine as the pre-existence of Christ and his co-eternity with the Father. But if there be any truth or utility in this way of thinking about the Trinity, perhaps it lies in its avoidance of the traditional language of patristic doctrine. For the potentially tritheistic implications of such phrases as "proceeding from the Father and the Son", "*consubstantial* and *co-eternal*", or simply "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" are virtually inescapable. In any case, what has been said is, by express intention, put forward as humbly suggestive rather than as dogmatically exhaustive or definitive. If a case has been made out at all for the validity of an analogy between the artistic process and the divine process, no more is claimed for it than a very limited pertinence and application.

One aspect of its pertinence, however, may be to the debate on demythologization. For, if the divine process, of which the incarnation was the centre, is analogous to the artistic process in anything like the manner suggested, it is

<sup>1</sup> The root meaning of *ὁπόστασις*, 'that which underlies' has no relationship to any practicable use of the word 'person' to-day; nor can it have. To the theological philologue alone is it intelligible in something like its original signification. To continue to use 'person' in its theological sense is as misleading as it would be to use the word 'enthusiast' as a term of abuse.

no wonder that the earliest Church and the writers of the N.T. resorted to symbolic means of communication in order to pass on to the world the news of God's action and irruption into history. In fact, even if, at this point, the use of the word 'symbol' is abandoned, leaving the bare analogy with the arts to stand alone without the aid of a word to describe the typical product of its process, so long as the applicability of this analogy be admitted, it is evident that the incarnation could scarcely have been described in any terms other than those used in the arts. For terms which might have been suitable to Ebionism or Docetism must inevitably have failed to apply to a belief which asserts that God has been revealed, once for all, at that 'point' where the material meets the transcendent, and the particular embodies the eternal. But the arts, with Christianity, stand or fall upon their claim that this is precisely the *locus* of significant truth. Neither can ever admit that mere appearance — sense data — is final. Still less can they afford to depreciate material reality which constitutes the very fabric of their respective revelations. Instead, both must uphold the real existence of a meeting point of the transcendent and the material, the Word and flesh, Spirit and stuff. "Here," mutely asserts a Cézanne landscape, "in *this* particular material spectacle of sunshine and rock, there is revealed in the matter of the landscape a harmonious order of reality which yet transcends that in which it is embodied." "Here," proclaims the gospel, "in *this* material and particular man, Jesus, there is revealed God, who yet completely transcends him in whom he is wholly embodied." So it is in the images and imagery of the N.T. that the truth of the gospel is embedded. A search for truth shorn of what is taken to be the fanciful embroidery and exaggeration of the images, such as was undertaken by various theologians in the quest for the historical Jesus at the beginning of this century, will succeed in finding only that for which it is looking: namely, bare materiality. Meanwhile, a search for the truth, set free from what some may regard as its scandalous anchorage

in history, has but a forlorn chance of escaping ship-wreck upon the rock of the gospel's insistence that the Word became flesh at a particular time and place in the person of a particular man.

However, matters cannot be left like that. For the bare assertion that the proper path to follow in the search for the truth of the gospel must lead to the great N.T. images, leaves unanswered the question of how to distinguish between true images and false ones; and this is a very difficult question to answer. The arts give warning that a search for a rule of thumb, by which to evaluate the images, is likely to be as chimerical and as dangerous as a search for a fixed criterion of infallible appreciation and judgement in the arts. But, in another respect, the arts are encouraging; for they suggest that a truly Christian image must have at least two recognizable characteristics: it must be rooted in history, and it must transcend history. This criterion of validity sounds exceedingly obvious, but its applications are easily overlooked. First, it means that each image (or collection of dramatic imagery in narrative form as is found in a myth) must be examined for an historical anchorage. If this cannot be found, the image must be rejected as false. This examination must be conducted on strictly historical lines, and only such elements in the image (or myth) may be pronounced historical as will survive the scepticism of historians; for faith, in the Christian sense, can never be equated with belief in spite of, or contrary to, the evidence. Indeed, such an attitude of mind is not a sign of Christian faith, but of human gullibility and credulity; whereas faith, to be Christian, must be faith that, because Christ is the truth, all truth will lead to him. So, in this matter of the images, true faith must manifest itself, not in credulity, but in loyalty to the objective standards of historical truth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That the historicity of a past event cannot be proved in the same way that a proposition in physics can be proved — that is to say, that a historical proposition cannot be proved by demonstration — is no excuse for disregarding, either the rigorous standards of historical criticism, or the accepted criteria of historical truth.

However, the necessary anchorage in history may legitimately be such as, at first sight, appears to be minimal. For, even though considerable elements of the birth stories in Matthew and Luke, for example, may conceivably be historical, the only thing that *must* be asserted of these stories, if they are to be regarded as free from the taint of Docetism, is that Jesus was born. The remaining elements in the stories may be (indeed, some would say, must be) regarded as commentary, in mythical form, upon the nature, significance, and consequences of that historical birth. The importance of the mythical elements in them depends upon their truth as comment, not upon their reliability as historical reminiscence; and their truth as comment cannot be proved or disproved only by resort to history. On the contrary, a fundamentalist insistence upon the historical actuality of every detail in the birth stories would be a thorough negation of the second necessary characteristic of a Christian image: the requirement that it should transcend history; for, since the Christian faith is based on the irruption of the transcendent into history, if the only elements in the birth stories were historical elements, there would be *a priori* grounds for rejecting them as being, therefore, un-Christian.

Though this may sound strange, it is not a matter of unsupported theory. Its truth has been vividly demonstrated in our own day. For, regularly, year by year at Christmas, in nativity plays, in 'Christmas programmes' on the wireless, in cribs, and in many other ways, uncritically harmonized and fundamentalist versions of the birth stories are presented as unadulterated historical reminiscence; and nothing is more painfully obvious than the fact that such presentations are not Christian at all. Far from presenting Christianity to the world, they present *pastiche* Christianity: dead, meaningless, unpleasantly sentimental, false, pretentious, and unbelievable either as history or as faith. Indeed, these *pastiche* presentations demonstrate most clearly the truth of the contention that the birth stories, like other Christian myths and images, are credible only when they

are regarded as being supra-historical: when they are regarded as being symbolic testimony to the transcendent significance of Christ's historical birth. They are, of course, more than poetic testimony to the birth as such. Matthew's version, for instance, provides a detailed commentary upon the failure of the Jews to recognize the nature of Christ; upon the Jewish attempt (successful in the end, as the writer knew) to destroy him; upon the eventual coming of the Gentiles, against all human expectation, to his feet, there to lay their wisdom and their wealth; and upon the cosmic and universal significance of this event which manifested itself symbolically even in the heavens. But all this is fatally obscured, if not wholly hidden, in the vulgar *pastiche* versions to which we are subjected with dismal persistence at Christmas time.

That this is the truth of the birth stories cannot be proved, however, any more than the 'truth' of a Masaccio can be proved. So, while there must be an objective criterion by which to judge the historic anchorage of a Christian image, as might have been expected from the beginning, there can be no objective guarantee by which those things which transcend objectivity may be authenticated. Instead, the transcendent components of the great Christian images will persist in an obstinate transcendence which, however inconvenient it may be to those who would forget or ignore the saying that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit",<sup>1</sup> emphasizes the fact that the truth of Christianity can never be taken by assault. "Now that you have come to know God, *or rather to be known by God*,"<sup>2</sup> wrote Paul to the Galatians; and the principle latent in this saying applies to the whole Christian endeavour, including the problem of how to acquire a knowledge of the truth enshrined in the great images and imagery of the N.T. For, when a man has been known by God, he will know the truth of the images; but, until he is known by God, he will not be able to wrest the truth of God from the images of God

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 12:3.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. 4:9.

by any rule of thumb, human criterion, or ready-made standard of judgement, however hard he may strive to do so.<sup>1</sup>

The arts suggest, therefore, that the aim of demythologization should be clearly understood and defined, before it is undertaken. For it would be utterly disastrous if its aim were simply to jettison the non-historical elements in the N.T. as being of no value or use. Nor need its object include the rejection on *a priori* grounds of imagery drawn from ancient cosmologies. Instead, it should be regarded as a process of distinguishing clearly between historical fact and symbolic commentary in all images, whether they be ancient or modern. Moreover, if the arts be our guide, this distinction cannot be made in too radical a manner; for a proper appreciation of the images must be dependent upon a prior recognition that they are indeed *images* and not bare facts. If a painting of a man by such an artist as Berlinghieri is regarded as being a mere representation of the physical appearance of an historical individual, it must be dismissed as anatomically impossible, historically incredible, and technically inefficient. For the same reasons, if such Christian imagery as is contained in the birth stories be regarded from a similar point of view, it must come under a like condemnation. So timid conservatism, fear of giving offence, and specious pleas of evangelistic expediency, all or any of which may militate against the acceptance of a radical distinction between the historical and the symbolic elements in the gospel, must be resisted as the devil's advocates; for to 'play safe' in this matter, preaching myth as history and image as fact, will be self-stultifying and self-defeating. In theology as in the arts, it can only lead to a dead *pastiche* version of the truth; and this is not to play safe, but to commit suicide.

<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to discuss the fundamental questions of Christian epistemology; but no task needs undertaking more urgently than that of exploring the respective natures of subjectivism, pragmatism, empiricism, existentialism, and Christian knowledge. Although they are distinct, they are easily confused; and such a confusion is disastrous.

Demythologization will be complete when the proper distinction between fact and image has been made. But this conclusion must be treated, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. For, if it be treated as an end, it will prove to be only another detached, objective, and academic method of analysing the biblical symbols into incompatible components. Whereas, if it is to deepen our understanding of God and the word of God, it must lead, not to yet another dismembering of Christian symbols, but to a re-unification of transcendence and image in the living Church. For the wonder of the gospel is not that, in N.T. times, there was a sudden crystal outcrop of miracles in the dull limestone of history which, in its passage across time, soon reverted to normal again. On the contrary, the real miracle of the gospel is that God in Christ inaugurated a new age, the characteristic of which is the continuing miracle of life in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a renewed understanding of Christian symbolism must lead to the living unity of transcendence and image, which is life in Christ; or it will have failed to be a *Christian* understanding. For, to-day as in N.T. times, men and women are not called primarily to assent to the validity of the images. They are called to *be* the imagery, as the Church is called to be the image, of Christ; and no objective study of the N.T. images can lead to a knowledge of their truth unless it lead also to a humble subjective rendering of the self to God as the subject of his artistry and the work of his hands. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus."



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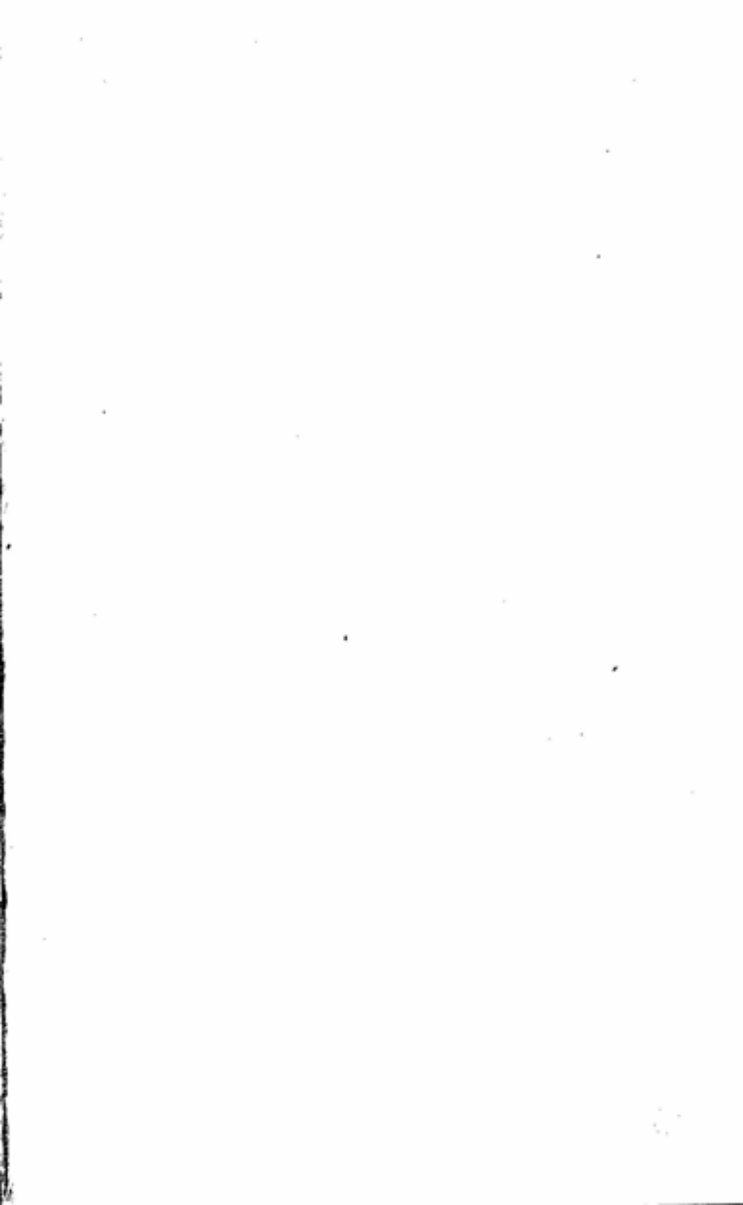
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